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The Whisper of a Name

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[*Grand-Louis l' Innocent*]

BY

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I

Not a soul was left on that desolate moor except one woman.

The house was oppressive, thick with shadows laid and overlaid like clothing in the bottom of a trunk. It made one want to shout, to tear the folds apart and let in the air.

Eve dared not. With an uneasy gesture she turned her head to peer about the room, while her body remained rigid, her elbows resting on the table. Fear, like a beast, crouched in her lap. It seemed to her that by pressing her knees together she might avoid arousing him from his slumber.

Once again the moor took up its evil twi-

light magic; became animate with hushed noises, with the murmur of voices interrupted by dreadful silences. The shroud of the fog wavered, the moaning of the ocean could be heard at intervals, and all the black-clad land, drawn streaming down the wind, had the appearance of a funeral cortège with the flutter of tamarind plumes at its head.

The house itself was strange, sinister, gripped to the rock, pierced by high narrow windows. In the preceding century it had served as a powder depot. Outside, a stone stairway leading up to a turret gave access to the flat roof.

The moor jutted out to sea, so that at high tide it became an island. On the top of the cliff stood the ruins of a redoubt.

Eve looked down at her paper. She saw there only pen jottings, scattered words, unfinished phrases. Thought no longer unrolled for

her its ordered arabesques, but produced only blots and scratches. And so it was each evening. . . .

The moor, the night and the sea would hurl themselves upon her, demolishing her fortress. . . . However, she had deliberately chosen it one day, thanks to the treacherous persuasion of the sunshine.

She tried to forget the black tempest, and called forth instead the white storms she had known so well in a past still all too recent. Before her rose the vast northern land, glittering, dangerous and magical. Its soil cracked under the tread of a mighty beast; the one was made for the other.

She heard the wind rushing from the maw of inconceivable distances, drunk with its own swiftness, roistering, heavy with snow; a storm-wind in which the human face was buffeted like the prow of a ship in the foam. She

felt the flakes melt on her lips and on the tips of her lashes. She saw again the flaming horizon, tumescent with crimson fires, where the nocturnal city rolled out the slow thunders of its laboring forge. And again she was plunged into the delirium of the tempest, her soul at one with it, borne on by fury and madness, her body congealed into metal.

Or perhaps it was the enchantment of winter mornings, exquisite and clear, when the forest held its breath so as not to break the crystal from its branches; the peace of the evenings, the velvet shadows projected over the dark blue snow . . . The whole world had a fragile and powdery appearance. At the meeting-place of earth and sky the giant river rested, motionless in its coat of mail, a moon-sword at its side.

Suddenly the white jungle came to life. A nameless race, with human features, shook

the armored earth; eyes blazed with a thirst for pleasure; a savage urge to action shattered the fabric of her refuge.

Eve crossed the black sentry-line of the moor and passed to the enemy.

II

It was only for a little while. The moor took her back.

Some one was there, behind the shutters. . . . Sea and wind suspended their merged complaint, which rose from the abyss of shadows like a double lamentation. And in the stillness some one was breathing. . . . Quite near her, beyond the wall. Out there . . . a giant of darkness and evil.

He tested each wooden slat, tried his fingernails along the grooves. No violence—but cunning more terrifying.

Eve's hand went to her throat. Useless to cry out. The distant village was asleep.

She extinguished the lamp. Her heart was

beating wildly against the edge of the table. The fire made a red blotch on the hearth.

The noise drew nearer. Her hands fluttered to her face, pressed against her temples. The shutters were massive, the windows high, the door almost impossible to force. What had she to fear?

It was the moor which was thus personified in the invisible prowler; surely it was the terror which through so many long evenings had accumulated in the depths of her heart. . . . She felt herself paralyzed in every limb, here in this stone tomb of a house, where fear alone seemed living.

He was making the round of the windows, trying the shutters one after another. A gust of wind assailed the chinks; a thousand hands seemed to clap against the walls. A cautious, feline deliberation governed the movements of the marauder. He stopped at the door,

shook it gently, turned the knob, tried the bolt and the hinges. Then silence and immobility.

Eve lighted the lamp again. The beast of fear was lying at her feet. The white jungle, inspirer of strength, had conquered; the vanquished moor recoiled toward the sea. With steps almost mechanical she walked to the door, and with a quick movement turned the lock.

The light fell upon a tall silhouette. The man made no gesture of retreat. His arms hung at his sides. The moor framed a motionless figure.

He was clad in a fisherman's jacket, with sleeves too short, and canvas trousers reaching not quite to his ankles. A handkerchief hung from his pocket. His cheeks were sunken; his level eyes gazed with deep simplicity from a face sculptured by the wind.

His head was uncovered, with its graying hair tossed back.

Several minutes passed. Surprise riveted Eve to the threshold. The body of iron which she had fancied her own suddenly softened. The apparition bore no sign of evil.

For apparition it was. A sort of bewilderment flickered in the tranced gaze; then the tall shadow which filled the frame of the door turned slowly, and was clutched by the night. The wind again began its clamor, like the noise of torn sails flapping.

Eve reentered the house.

III

MONTHS passed, and Eve had become inured to her loneliness. The white jungle still reared its pageant from deep in her memory. At the evocation her homesick soul became like a haunted fir-tree in the gale, high on the top of a cliff.

The thin breeze flowed down, charged with sounds, colors and fragrance, and made the sea-shells tinkle. All things blended in a wan harmony; she could not tell to which sense each separate element was directed. The touch of snow on her face thrilled like a perfume. The North reigned again, and imposed its spell. With a kind of melancholy rapture she hurried out upon its plains. The world,

ground to powder, no longer had boundaries. A mist crept to the horizon; the tempest raised its forest architecture in the wastes, its massive trunks and delicate foliage. There she might walk until death, now and then running across her human kind in search of prey. And there she might also encounter gentle glances, as from the eyes of a fawn in the thicket, quickly vanishing.

The moor, for its part, grew ever more vast. Her spirit wandered from one domain to the other, and between them she tried to find peace. She searched deep in her own heart, for this was the hour of reckoning. Now or not at all. . . . She must bring order out of this unrest, escape this pall, flee from this white sorcery. The shadow of the moor, thin, stark and cruel, must be her refuge.

That day Eve had pushed her table close to the door. One might have thought that blue-

bleached linen was drying on the bushes, with the sunshine playing over its folds. The peninsula, its bare back arched, leaned to the sea to drink, and overhead the gulls were soaring.

She set herself to build a rampart against the land of ghosts. From somber depths her soul was calling. She must descend to the inner kingdom, discover herself in its mysteries, penetrate to the light. She must begin the song; the sea, the moor and the wind would tame their rhythm to hers, and the North would cease to sob passionately in her memory.

IV

A SHADOW crept over the threshold. She felt it, like a weight upon her lowered eyelids.

She had not heard the gate open; the moor had complacently allowed free passage to the vagabond of the night. All the sunshine of this mild November noonday lighted his face. His lips were parted in a faint smile, which the painful fixity of his gaze belied.

He passed in front of her and went into the house, holding his sailor's cap against his breast. With crossed hands, with light step, with eyes raised high to the walls, he advanced as if he were entering a chapel.

Eve did not move. Let the sleep-walker rouse himself. . . .

He gazed at the Chinese lantern hung from the ceiling, the bright cretonnes on the sofa and small windows, the curtain of the alcove, the green-framed mirror, the gleaming bookcase.

He paused before the hearth, where the oak fire was giving off an autumnal fragrance. His powerful shoulders shivered under his jacket, as if only now had he remembered that he was cold. He cast an apprehensive glance toward the doorway, but doubtless saw no one, for he spread his hands to the blaze with an air of deep satisfaction. The open door to the next room arrested his attention. He stared a moment, then walked toward it with his long mechanical stride. The table had not yet been cleared and the aroma of coffee still hung in the air.

Astonished by his impassivity, Eve drew near. He was standing before the food that

was left, his hands still crossed on his breast, clasping his cap. An expression of pain, preplexity and desire marked his features.

She pushed the bread and fruit toward him. His hands descended. While he stooped to eat she watched his muscular neck, free in the loose collar, and browned by the sun and the salt water. His humble garments were surprisingly neat.

Still he did not see her. The lamplight fell upon the food; all else was hidden in the gloom.

When he had finished she poured out the hot coffee, stirred it with a silver spoon and held the cup to him. He drank from her hands like a convalescent, and as he leaned forward she saw at close range the shadows gathered under his eyes. The big stalwart body trembled; it had just borne him upon a weary journey.

His drinking finished, he raised his head and seemed to sense rather than see Eve's presence at his side. With an extraordinary expression his eyes sought hers; his whole face, in its startled intensity, begged mutely for understanding. There drifted over it a sweetness at once potent and disarming. One would have said that this man had never lived among men; his was the clean gaze of a woodland creature. And yet in its transparent depth lurked a dim trace of fear that rose by degrees to the surface. His lips quivered, a low wordless sound stirred in his throat, and the waif over whom something had cast a spell fled off across the moor.

Eve pressed her hands to the table in silence and her eyes looked far away, over the sea.

V

"The soul of the North." . . . Suddenly the title struck her as pretentious, almost grotesque. She blushed as if a stranger were reading it over her shoulder.

What had she understood of that soul she was trying to define? The great country over there was no longer hidden. From beyond the seas it watched her with unclouded gaze, enveloped her, waved snowy fingers above her head, bathed her eyes in a supernatural radiance. Each evocation of the past was a dazzling flash, each recollection as fragile as foam. It seemed to her that memory had become a bright garden in which a procession of communicants marched, singing.

Her body too, remembering, felt upon it the twisted scourge of the storm. The horses of the wind thundered over the road. The air was a sounding anvil. On the horizon, now drawn near, feathery treetops enclosed a narrow patch of sky, like a country garden in a hedge of hawthorns, miraculously flowering.

But the race privileged to dwell in that domain was unapproachable. The soul of the North took wing in the tempest; now and again she could hear its metallic laughter; a light radiated from it as cold as the sheen of the frozen landscape. The epoch of the world's awakening was reenacted. Its men were, as in the beginning, great tawny animals, moving with the tiger's spring, all muscles, all flesh, all appetite, all intoxication at the uncurbed freedom of their pace. The earth belonged to them. Why need they trouble themselves about footprints left upon it; the snow so quickly covered every sign.

Moreover, *those* footprints led to a closed house, but the soul of the North belonged to the unwalled air.

To daring that soul added cunning; it was like a white wolf that fled for protection behind the hills of ice, and snarled savagely whenever intruders from the south ventured upon the glacis. Just as of old, it resisted every incursion, drove the swarming Latin hordes back to their cradle-land. Or, when puny invaders approached, armed only with the thin barb of their metaphysic, it crushed them in a single fatal embrace.

In other days Eve had ventured into the waste, and now she felt its dread compulsion again upon her. At times her heart became that lost and stricken creature fleeing blindly over a land without solace, among men without mercy.

One austere face stood out from among the the others and personified them all; it became

the portrait of a race. It stared from the walls of her frozen house. When she approached, a wintry mist drifted out to enfold her, pale eyes pierced her through, cold lips hardened in bitter curves.

Soul of the North—the masculine soul! For here, as everywhere, woman was only the sweet silvered figure couched upon the slab, the motif repeated endlessly in bas-relief, the arabesque but faintly traced.

Eve had brought back from abroad the spectral statue of ice and snow, to erect it in fancy here upon the plain, draping a moist cloth over its unfinished face. Now she was striving to give permanence to its elusive features. To do so she must penetrate the mask, wind up the heart that had stopped, solve the dark riddle.

And having solved it, hold out her hands to a phantom.

VI

This time, without hesitation she opened the door.

The man whom people along the coast called Big Louis—and tapped their foreheads at the name—was standing at the threshold. Eve was not surprised.

His tall figure seemed to incline toward the entrance, but he did not advance. Rain was trickling from the roof, and he tried fumblingly to turn up the collar of his jacket. His gaze rested upon Eve. His lips moved piteously, and he shook his head with a gesture of helplessness.

A gust of wind almost blew out the light. Eve moved cautiously, so as not to frighten him.

"Come in," she said in a low voice. And as he did not seem to understand, she took him by the sleeve and drew him in.

Water was dripping from his garments, and he looked uneasily at the muddy spots that his feet were making on the carpet.

She led him to the hearth. He was shivering.

"Sit down and rest yourself. Don't be worried. I'm going to fix you a drink."

She took the lamp and went into the back room. While the water was heating she cautiously examined the vagabond.

He had remained standing before the fire, his arms crossed on the mantelpiece. Without moving he was staring down at the flames.

She returned with the steaming toddy in an earthenware bowl, and set the lamp again upon the table. The man still had his back toward her. She had to touch him on the shoulder.

"You must drink it while it's hot," she said gently.

He started from his reverie, sniffed the beverage, looked at it greedily. Then with his long fingers spread out, holding the bowl close to his chest, he drank slowly, gravely keeping his eyes lowered. The color came back to his face.

"Now you're going to dry yourself." She made signs for him to take off his water-soaked sabots and put his feet upon the stool.

He obeyed. Lulled by the warm atmosphere, heavy with weariness, suffused by an obscure contentment, he nevertheless held his body erect in the high-backed armchair.

Soon, however, his head sank upon his shoulder, and he fell asleep. Eve lifted the bowl from his knees without rousing him, drew back to her place at the table, and, bend-

ing over the sheets of paper, took up her pen again. In vain. Her glance kept stealing back to the sleeping man. She was not afraid of him—and yet how carefully she had been locking herself in her stone house when evening came!

Now the moor was friendly. The soul of the North was fleeing far into its pallid forests; the statue of ice was softening, its features melting away; the wild sob of the ocean became a cadenced and mortal breathing that echoed softly within this little shell of a house. In the deep fireplace only a charring log remained, straight and red as an icon-lamp. Let the tempest rage upon the plain; this cot was snug and warm. . . . The log fell; the sleeping man started and opened his eyes. Realization slowly gathered in his stare. He got up, doubtless resigned to the belief that he was to be driven forth. With an abrupt movement

he opened the door. The light flickered dangerously, and Eve had to shelter it with her hand.

Rain and wind and spray of the sea were meeting in fearful combat yonder beyond the moor. None would abate and none could conquer, so that low above the plain the sound of their conflict was like the bluster of swollen, flapping, twisted sails that were ripping one another to pieces.

"Where will you sleep?" she cried.

Had he heard? He made a vague gesture toward the coast. But she knew that no shelter was to be found along that rocky parapet battered by the waves.

She watched him plunge into the rain. In an instant his jacket was drenched and sticking to his back. Suddenly her decision was made.

"Wait! You *can't* stay out in this weather!"

She had to pull him back by the sleeve, not because he rebelled but doubtless because the import of human speech reached him only by a labyrinthine way, perhaps also because at the moment his ears were deafened by the angry whistling of the wind.

She snatched up a candle, tossed a cape over her shoulders and made a sign for him to follow her along the house to the stone stairway.

"Quick! Quick!" she cried, and he hurried on, just at her heels.

She opened the door of the granary and lighted the candle, which threw a dim illumination down the long room. The slates on the roof rattled like dry leaves. At the end toward the sea, opposite the dormer window, stood a deal table, a chair and an iron bed—furnishings for a cenobite's cell on the soundless top of the world! At the other end was

a pile of hay still redolent with the fragrance of summer.

She often came to this retreat to gaze out over the sea, to dream, or to write, and sometimes in its murmurous seclusion she had fallen asleep.

"I believe you will be all right here, Big Louis," she said. "Lie down. See—here's a good blanket. You will close the door after me, won't you? . . . Good night."

She stumbled down the stairs. The wind seemed to be trying to behead the turret; the flat roof, swimming in the downpour, was like a raft on the ocean. The icy rain that overflowed the eave-troughs dripped on her neck, as with bent head she hurried back along the wall. She was shivering, but she entered the house with a sense of relief that no one should be wandering about in that terrible night through any fault of hers. The wild mutiny

of the elements stopped at the threshold, stifled its howling, abandoned its threats. Inside, the icon-lamp still burned.

She raked the embers together, took the bowl back to the other room and prepared for bed.

Suddenly it occurred to her that she had left the light up there in the hands of a man mazed in dream, lost in his own world of reverie. The candle—and that pile of dry hay so near . . . Alarmed, she snatched up her cape again.

The door at the top of the stairs was open. Big Louis was lying on the floor, sleeping with his head on his folded arm. The candle was burning on the table, like a wake-light near a coffin. Its furtive glimmer fell upon his peaceful face, upon the powerful arch of the brow, the high cheek-bones, the heavy lids that masked his somber eyes. The wind,

which stretched like an icy sheet along the floor, must have chilled the sleeper through his thin garments.

Eve took the blanket from the bed, spread it over him, blew out the candle and noiselessly closed the door behind her. As she left the cupola, wrapped in her cape, she had the appearance of a lonely nun who keeps watch in the tower of a convent.

VII

THE next day she was singing as she prepared breakfast. Sunlight poured over the plain and lay on her door-step, friendly and familiar as a pet cat. She called toward the stone stairway: "Big Louis!"

The name seemed to fill the air. Its two syllables, commonplace as they were, formed the pillars of an arch, through which the whole countryside came alive, stirred, assumed a stammering speech, an unreal visage, halting gestures.

"Big Louis!"

There was no answer. Pausing at the top of the stairs she repeated the call. The granary was empty. In surprise, she peered

through the window. The dust on the floor seemed to retain the imprint of a body. The blanket was on the bed, carefully folded. Leaving the door open, Eve descended the stairs.

He did not appear again for many days. The moor became a prison hostile and wearisome in its very stability, a forbidding barrier rimming the coast. Nothing disturbed its monotony; only the postman on his daily rounds and Vincente, the maid, passed through the gate.

Then one evening, just at twilight, she saw him from the window. He was gazing intently at the house, listening. When she signaled for him to come in she had the strange feeling that he was taking her face between his hands. He searched her features, seeming only gradually to recognize her. But the kindness she had shown him warmed the embers of his

memory, and happy in the thrill of welcome he crossed the familiar threshold.

With a sigh he sat down before the fire. It was as if a heavy hand had descended upon his shoulder. Outside, he identified himself with nature, sustaining like her the hardships of the seasons and opposing them with the same passive resistance. There was an entente between nature and himself; he knew that her trials would not surpass his strength. But within doors uneasiness took possession of him, the air he breathed grew thin, things pressed upon him. These things had, as certain women have, prying countenances that drew close to question him. They besought him to remember, and he tried to drive them back. Their enveloping sweetness was full of menace. He preferred the frank play of the open air. There he was among men; there he could defend himself, find his own shelter, as-

suage his hunger. There he found his joys, and there at times he spread his arms to the sunlight and stood motionless, the better to hear the tumultuous heart throbbing in his breast.

He could no longer feel the rapport that must once have existed between him and indoor things. Somewhere there was a severed bond, a lapse in the harmony. Happy faces in a circle of lamplight wavered before his eyes, skulking shadows that haunted the corners would rise to frighten him, taking the posture of animals about to spring. But out-of-doors, as soon as the specters threatened, the wind hustled them away beyond the veil of the sky or ran them to cover among the familiar scenes of the earth. He was himself a wandering shadow, needing space, movement, the assurance of boundless liberty.

Eve, having arranged a place for him op-

posite her own, leaned over and took his cap from his hands. He looked up at her with a hesitant, anxious expression, and then, reassured by her smile, settled himself at the table. Although he was plainly very hungry he waited, watching all her movements, and trying to imitate them. The way in which she managed her soup seemed to astonish him. He brought his own spoon to his mouth cautiously, closed his lips to a slit and drew in his breath. The noise was so stupendous that Eve burst out laughing. This strange man joined in the laughter, his big eyes bright with merriment, his strong lips curling back from glistening teeth. But his gaiety ceased abruptly, and he set himself again to his lesson. She offered him the viands, naming them in a low voice. He bent forward, concentrating his attention with a kind of desperate earnestness, as if to catch elusive murmurs in the depth of his

consciousness. His lips, grown strange to human speech, were forcing themselves again to mold the words and were repeating them in stammering, soundless echoes.

When the meal was finished Eve opened the door. She who had lived long in cities had not yet grown accustomed to seeing nature so near—nature that was like a living creature on her door-step. An obscure compulsion made her stretch out her hand to it—a vague caress in the darkness. Night had descended suddenly, completely, as if a lamp had been extinguished. The revolving flare of a beacon at intervals lighted the slumbering countryside with a weird and terrible brilliance. Then instantly darkness again; paths and roads were hidden, and the moor was plotting once more beneath its mask.

Hesitating, Eve turned toward Big Louis. He was kneeling before the hearth, fixing the

fire. His movements were slow, careful, marked by a simple and direct intention. The glow from the embers cast his profile in bronze.

She left him to himself, and sitting down at the table, with her back toward him, took her manuscript from the drawer. Each became absorbed in his own task, each worked with the same ardor, the same clearness of purpose, and, she realized, the same sense of accomplishment. The lamplight seemed somehow to impart to her fingers an agility almost fluid, while the rebellious flames on the hearth limned with lurid flashes the curving torso of the man.

VIII

Big Louis had acquired the habit of returning. . . . He never entered the house of his own accord, however, but would stand waiting a few paces from the window. And each time that Eve went to meet him she felt the curious attraction of his slow gaze; it was as if he were unwittingly drawing her to him. Then when she was near a faint smile would overrule the mistrust in his face.

For his sake she moderated her usual vivacity. Her speech sought only the gist of words, her gestures became more precise, her current of thought slower. She had the sense of watching life at its beginnings; she must explore everything without haste, pass cau-

tiously from one wonder to another. And Big Louis would follow just behind her, eager and bewildered.

However, he had made some progress. The habits of another existence began to link themselves together and to take on meaning. Now and then he would guess things, and surprise her by anticipating her movements. For example, he would suddenly open a door before she had let him know she wanted to go out, and stand there in a strange half-light of understanding, waiting for her to pass, his head bent down to her and the joy of having read her thought shining in his eyes.

He had now a certain vocabulary at his disposal. It related to the weather, the sea, the hazy horizon where his soul seemed to dwell, and sometimes to an even more nebulous world where she followed him with difficulty. He would name the objects about them, Eve's

household activities, and the tasks which they performed together. He would offer to fetch wood from the shed and water from the well. And when he had spoken, both would listen attentively a moment, as if for the echo of the syllables he had laboriously assembled. A simple sentence was a triumph. He would pronounce it with utmost care, letting his voice poise on each separate word, as a person balances step by step along a plank across an unfamiliar stream. And he found support in the glance which met him from the other side.

For him dumb objects were animate beings, some of them endowed with a malevolent power. Once when he had scorched his sabots, as he lay half asleep near the hearth, he violently reproached the flames and, leaping up, tried to stamp them out. In the evening when the wind tried to creep under the door Big Louis would scowl out at the night and go

through the motions of chopping wood, so that Eve might understand the intention of this wicked forester to demolish their house. For some unknown reason the foaming waves were the "Ladies" and the halo of the moon the "Holy Virgin."

His memory was faulty. Several times she sent him on errands to the village, or trusted him to put letters in the box before the postman came. Hours later she would see him standing on the bridge, watching the sea-gulls settle on the island, and she could be sure that the letters were still in his pocket. When she questioned him he would not know why nor how they came to be there. At last, discouraged, she gave up trying to make him accountable. For this man no connection existed between an idea and its execution, no relation between parts of the same action. When she tried to make him reason his eyes would re-

veal a sort of pained bewilderment. But he knew that his failure disappointed her, and in his humility he seemed to be asking pardon.

He now took most of his meals here at Landier. He no longer seemed so shabby, and his cheeks had filled out, his shoulders straightened. He wore a heavy woolen vest that had been knitted for him by one of the countrywomen.

But their budget was badly balanced. No more money came to Eve from abroad. Vincente no longer helped with the housework. They ate the coarse war bread.

One day she tried an experiment. It was time for the evening meal, and he had just returned from one of his tramps along the coast. The table was set as usual, but the stove was cold and the plates were empty.

He uncovered the pots one by one, observing with surprise that there was nothing in

them. Eve, seated in her accustomed place, watched his movements.

Finally he turned toward her.

"I am hungry."

As she did not reply he came and touched her lightly on the shoulder.

"I am hungry."

In his voice was a melancholy gentleness mingled with reproach.

"I, too, Big Louis. But there is no supper this evening."

She waited for him to ask why. The question did not come. Then she took him by the arm, led him to the buffet, opened it and showed him that it too was empty.

"No more bread, no more meat, no more fish."

Next she showed him the drawer which usually held the money she kept for their daily purchases.

"You see, no more money. You understand, don't you, Big Louis? The money is all gone. And there is nothing to eat."

The word "money" which she used purposely did not impress him. He saw no connection between money and what composed a meal. Like a child he repeated, in a far-away voice:

"No more bread, no more meat, no more fish. . . . "

He was astonished that the miracle of the set table, with its viands renewed each time he returned, was not performed to-day.

Then Eve, with characteristic caprice, abandoned her stratagem.

"Let's see, just the same, if the shipwrecked sailors can't find something on this raft of the moor!"

She spoke gaily. He did not understand all the words, but as usual he sensed their

meaning, this time with an eagerness heightened by contrition.

Mounted on a chair, she explored the cupboard. Some obscure, half-realized scruple made her reluctant to lie to him; it was true that there was no bread or meat or fish. But on the top shelf she discovered some crackers, a can of preserves, a jar of English jam, and some Chinese tea. Bending down, she placed her find in the outstretched arms of Big Louis, who laughed delightedly.

After the meal they remained for a long time at the table, their elbows on the cloth, their faces serene with a sense of communion, their glances meeting in the mist of their dream. Eve raised her eyes above the head of Big Louis to a patch of March sky that showed through the window and in which already gleamed the first soft promises of spring.

IX

Big Louis did not come back for several days. Eve was not alarmed, accustomed as she was to his sudden disappearances, and yet for a subtler reason she gradually grew uneasy. The tranquillity which they had achieved was broken; the North again sounded its tragic call, laid upon her face its blasphemous caress and poured its quicksilver through her veins. The white cavalcade of the tempest, with crystal lances raised aloft and silvery banners streaming, met and repulsed the masked battalions of the moor. The stone house was sealed anew over a living heart that prayed once more for rescue.

This time when he reappeared he was car-

rying on his head a flat willow basket which he placed upon the door-step. Then he went from one window to another, standing on tip-toe to peer in. She had noticed that he never called her by name, and that after his absences he never entered the house without being invited. He was still a phantom, still a ghost of the plain. Now he was waiting, his gaze fixed on the window. And she knew that he would stand there in silence until she should acknowledge his return.

Long, vibrant bodies, bluish silver in color, lashed about in the basket, under a covering of wild ferns.

Eve questioned him with a look. An expression of pride passed over his face. He lifted the basket carefully and entered the kitchen. Walking with more assurance than usual he went straight to the cupboard and opened the doors.

No more bread, no more meat, no more fish. . . .

"Here is fish . . . for you," he said.

Confusion seized her and she found herself stammering a reply. Curiously moved, she realized that at her remembered need this man of shadows had descended from his retreat on the headland to cast his nets into the sea. And he had returned to place at her feet his miraculous catch.

She watched him while he set to work. Without realizing that it was not meal-time he revived the fire, prepared the fish and put a plate on the table. Then he took her by the arm and made her sit down. Very carefully he served her, and, having finished, took his stand behind her, his hands holding the back of her chair.

"It is for you!" he kept repeating in his eager and uncertain voice. "Eat, eat!"

Although she was not hungry she obeyed. The emotion which had tightened her throat a little while before was giving place to a tender amusement. He watched her gravely, steadily, without making a movement or saying another word, but she felt that each morsel she ate caused him satisfaction.

"It was very good, Big Louis, you miracle-fisherman," she said at last.

She knew it would be useless to ask where he got the fish. He would only make a vague gesture toward the open.

Yet the matter was not really mysterious. Soon Big Louis had taken up again his habits of the famine days. He would roam along the coast at the hours when the boats set sail and at his first opportunity leap aboard. As there was no better sailor than he, the men gave him a rough but friendly welcome and crowded together to make a place for him. On the return,

and after the ration of soup had been served on board, he would wait silently and patiently for his share of the fish, instead of slipping away as he had formerly done when once his hunger was assuaged.

One day he arrived at the house in a state of extraordinary excitement. His eyes were blazing and his lips trembled. She had never seen him so agitated. His habitual gentleness had seemed to place a rampart of dignity about his affliction.

He displayed his empty basket, but the explanations he tried to give guttered forth in inarticulate noises, painful to hear. She did her best to calm him. For the first time she felt in him a massive and stubborn strength, upon which her tenderness might play in vain.

Vincente followed at his heels, almost as excited as Big Louis himself. Some foreign fishermen, who used a steam drag-net—quar-

relsome fellows who were always drunk—had tried to pick a fight with him. During the altercation they had jostled him and sent his basket rolling in the dust.

Big Louis, the fabulous Big Louis whom little children trustfully accompanied when they met him on the road, had thrown himself upon his assailants, foaming with rage. He would have tried to strangle them, Vincente reported, if some fishermen of the neighborhood had not intervened. The strangers were now carousing over their glasses in the low tavern in the village.

Big Louis took his accustomed place by the hearth. From his stone-like immobility one might have thought he was dreaming, except for the persistent glow, like banked fire, that smoldered deep in his eyes. His hands no longer trembled, but pallor had overspread his features.

Suddenly he got up and opened the door. For some minutes he stood on the threshold, his arms crossed, his head thrown back, an expression of vengeful determination on his face. His eyes searched the bleak stretches of the moor. Eve felt herself shivering. Would he dash out to hunt his tormentors?

Timidly she approached him. Her head reached scarcely to his shoulder. This unfamiliar Big Louis frightened her. Almost in a whisper she murmured his name, and her voice was full of distress. He turned, and seemed only gradually to perceive at his side this woman's face which anxiety had made small and helpless as the face of a child. Now it was he who took her by the shoulders and led her gently toward the hearth. And the spinning-wheel of their quiet home resumed its peaceful humming.

X

One morning they met out on the moorland, far from the house and from their common haunts. Through some mysterious alchemy the unfamiliar surroundings made them also strange, and in the metamorphosis lurked the shadow of peril.

The sun, though high on its course, was invisible in the cloudy sky. Big Louis approached through a haze which blurred the outlines of his figure. Detached from his background of the moor he might have seemed grotesque, in his scant and shabby garments, but now Eve was conscious only of his strength.

Face to face, they remained silent. In spite of his effort to smile he did not seem to recognize her. In his expression uncertainty

mingled with a new timidity. These two were like passengers of a ship who, after having seen each other every day on deck, wrapped in blankets in their steamer-chairs, or every evening in gala attire, meet by chance on land and find themselves strangers. After a long moment of this troubled, questioning trance Big Louis took his place at her side, and they continued their walk in silence.

She had chosen the highway that led straight across the peninsula. On one side could be seen a stretch of ocean, blue and somber behind the cold fretwork of the coast, and on the other side the clearer basin of the Gulf of Morbihan, bordered by hamlets whose houses leaned toward each other like old ladies gossiping beneath their bonnets. The spire of the church of St. Gildas, built on a rocky promontory, rose like the mast of a ship above a sea of fog which hid the village.

The sun still lurked behind the clouds, and they had to hasten their steps to keep warm. They walked with the same rapid, rhythmic stride, not saying a word, their arms swinging at their sides, their heads held high.

The mist which veiled the sun seemed to be an emanation of vapors and nocturnal perfumes which floated up from the earth. When it cleared away, the air, freed of the weight, gathered movement and velocity. At the impact of its brisk freshness they felt their lungs expand.

On the right, toward the coast, rose a sort of giant cairn which was called Le Petit-Mont. Eve pointed to it, and they turned in that direction. One behind the other they crossed a strip of heath covered with a prickly growth of furze. Eve lifted her skirt about her slim strong legs, and the bare ankles of Big Louis were scratched by the brambles without his

seeming to notice. Pulling her up after him he plunged into the tortuous path that led to the summit of the cairn.

On the other side of the road they could see a second hill, similar in shape but higher—the Grand-Mont. Each cone was supported on rock formations of a Gallo-Romanic appearance. Tough briars grew everywhere, and the mounds formed in the flat country two domes of verdure.

Eve, who was surveying the landscape, turned to point out what she believed to be Landier. Abruptly she checked her gesture.

Her companion was standing with his arms crossed, his face toward the sea. His eyes, half closed, nevertheless took in the whole wide sweep of the view. His long hair tossed back from his forehead gave him the aspect of a prophet. A strange radiance from within seemed to blend with the sun-glow that bathed

his features. She noticed that his lips again were trembling but not from fury now. She did not try to guess what agitated him; whether an emotion of the soul or the same physical joy which she felt suffusing her own being.

Big Louis was uttering broken exclamations, and a stormy breath swelled his chest.

A recollection, vivid and arresting, rose in Eve's mind. She had been out walking one cold winter day when the wind blew so hard that she could see nothing ahead and the sidewalk was cramped between high banks of snow. The street, under the barrage of whirling flakes, had become only a vague ditch bordered by white-draped elms and willows. Suddenly she had to step aside to make way for a nurse-maid who was pushing on a sled a child warmly muffled in furs. The tiny face that peeped out from the downy wrappings

was red with cold, but the bright eyes were alert in the storm. As they passed close to her he emitted a squeal of delight and bent forward with his mouth open, so that his sharp little teeth seemed to be trying to bite the pelting snow.

Absurd though the comparison might be, Eve recognized in Big Louis this same blind joy of living. And she sensed in the giant who stood beside her, here on the top of the world, the sway of an elemental and ruthless force that shook him as a powerful mast is shaken by a storm wind.

XI

It was especially in the evening that he seemed unreal. He no longer strove to reach a world whose edges slipped through his fingers, but assumed again his own personality and returned to his own enchanted domain. Eve did not try to invade it. His shadowy bourne was like the reflection of a landscape, upside down in the water, a mirage which she knew she could not approach. In his withdrawal lay a mystery which it would have been sacrilege to penetrate.

This circumstance pleased her feminine heart. She experienced in it a romance that she could never have imagined. Here at her side was a soul with outlines so changing, so

illimitable, that she could not hope to comprehend it or to overtake its flight. She could only follow with outstretched arms. Each day rewove the mystical veil between them; renewed the impenetrable dusk. They would remain strangers to each other; they would meet always under a new aspect, hide elusive secrets in their actions, unforeseen meanings in their words. Nor would they end by discovering each other. There would never be that slow and dreadful fusion of two spirits; each would watch over his own. They would continue to pass with smiles on their lips and masks over their eyes. During the evenings they were separated by only an arm's length, and yet the distance was immense. Each descended into the labyrinth of his shrouded being, but each heard the footsteps of the other also going down. Neither could build except in solitude, nor create except with his own

hands. Each would dig his own deep mine, and, with ear attentive at the sentry-post, listen for the reassuring echo, far off at first, then drawing nearer, that told of an invisible but parallel endeavor just beyond the wall. Neither had as yet reached the goal; only the first stopping place, where they could hear each other working impatiently to roll the shadows back. And in these secret tunnels of the spirit the gloom of their labor gathered over them like a black subterranean dust.

In his daily life Big Louis struggled with phantoms, and the implacable moor haunted him. The woman for her part was a frail and slender silhouette in the desert, a troubled captive upon whom the wide kingdom of other days again imposed its fateful silvered hands. All about her were tumult, madness, barbaric shouts, but suddenly beneath it all she heard the persuasive insinuations of a sensual lan-

guor. The wind became weary with its own violence and lulled itself to rest in the branches that linked themselves in a graceful arabesque around the horizon of this forest-mirage. That was the hour when the eyes of the faun, gentle and watchful, would appear among the foliage. Eve would creep up, with the fixed gaze of the hallucinated, only to find the soft eyes gone. And abruptly the tempest would awaken her with the lash of its cold mane across her face—a fabulous creature of an evil brood, that advanced with crushing tread.

Thus memory again became her conquering tyrant, and Eve begged for mercy. She must once for all break the enchantment, turn for support to the ruggedness of her native land, retreat to escape the risk of capture. She would seek refuge within herself. Gradually she would become accustomed to the dark-

ness. . . . And then through the wall of shadow came the realization of another stifled heart-beat, persistent and quite near—a realization that was like the gleaming shaft of the beacon-light that at intervals kindled the dusky surface of the moor. A deathless song arose, the song of two lonely souls. One voice was low but rich in ardor, the other choked with the pain of eager striving.

The man and woman groped for each other, so that together they might mount toward the light. Perhaps in the end the vault would collapse to entomb them, but without their hearing it fall. And while they waited they were forgetting that life is only a long retreat before the face of death.

XII

So FAR Eve had been little concerned with Big Louis' past. But now she determined to question him. She knew that he rarely caught the exact meaning of words, but she had noticed that he often understood a look. At times it was enough if she directed toward him an unspoken but insistent suggestion, some mute request or command. During the long winter evenings when his impassivity began to get on her nerves she would test this power by willing him to perform some simple act, or at least to make a movement that would prove him alive, and not a figment of her imagination. Without moving from her place or uttering a sound she conveyed the

message, and soon she would feel Big Louis questioning her with his eyes. He would come and stand by her with a perplexed air, until, reassured by her smile he would resume his motionless reverie.

To-day she placed an album of photographs on the table. It contained views of far countries; of squat houses under bonnets of snow, of copper roofs, and of curious belfry-spires. The same landscapes recurred throughout the album, some of the pictures showing the beauties of field or forest or river. Eve, as she gazed, longed to stretch herself somewhere on that unspoiled earth, to savor its shade, its coolness, its grateful stillness. And she felt that the man should be understanding and accompanying her. But how far away he was! How surely he hurried to another gleaning! Perhaps to the sun-drenched vineyards of the south, where amid the clear laughter of the

women gathering grapes he could lose himself in their singing that had trilled through the centuries. . . .

But this was sheer imagining. Nothing touched Big Louis. He passed his finger over the paper, wondering at its sheen and smoothness. That naive sensation interposed itself between him and the pictures. She saw that she could not by this means stir his memory.

Struck by an inspiration, Eve brought from the drawer a collection of portraits, some of which she had had—over yonder. . . . The first was of her only brother, who had died on the field of battle. Big Louis seized the portrait, turned it toward the light, studied the uniform intently. His glance scarcely paused on the face.

Breathless, her heart contracting in her breast, Eve followed the fierce absorption of his gaze. When his attention seemed to relax

she placed before his eyes the sad relics—the Croix de Guerre, a helmet, a whistle attached to a leather cord, a discolored musette. Alas, there were other mementoes even more painful. . . . She had, rolled in a drawer, a slate-cloth blackboard which until the moment before her departure had remained attached to the wall of her brother's study, in the house where he was born. During his last furlough the young man had amused himself by tracing upon it geometrical figures. No one had had the courage to erase them. . . .

Big Louis passed a trembling hand over the helmet, and put the whistle to his lips. Eve started in terror. A thin wailing sounded through the room, a ghostly summons that seemed to drift in from the moor. . . . Big Louis' brows were drawn together as if by physical suffering; his breath came quickly and his eyes held a distracted stare.

Eve knew that the test had lasted long enough. But when she started to put away the picture he made a gesture of protest, and clasped his hands over it.

"That's enough for this morning, isn't it, Big Louis? To-morrow we'll look at it again."

He maintained his stubborn posture. After a moment of silence she tried familiar words, the phrases of each evening, and, according to custom, got up to light the candle, saying softly:

"It's time, Big Louis."

He gazed at her, slowly released his grasp of the picture and went out.

Later it pleased her to continue the experiment. She had still other photographs; pictures of her young women friends—many women, some in evening gowns, their lovely shoulders bare; some in street clothes, now gone out of fashion; others in the simplicity of

sport costume and bobbed hair. There were also pictures of children. . . .

What would she discover? Well, she had at least learned that memory was not dead in him, and that for Big Louis a soldier's uniform had significance.

XIII

One Sunday afternoon they were sitting out on the moor, watching the sea from the top of the headland. The landscape was a garden of dusty light. It was one of those days of a beauty so eternal that the contrast with mortal life brings to the solitary soul an ineffable sadness. But two spirits may make of it a pæan of joy.

To the right was a mass of inaccessible rocks; to the left a tiny bay whose shore was dotted with bath-houses for the use of tourists from the adjacent hotel. The holiday season had not yet begun.

Two peasant women were standing on the beach, near the edge of the water. Twilight, beginning to settle, folded the deserted fields

beneath its dominical peace. The women were steadily watching the sea as if following something with their eyes. Some distance out a rowboat was anchored.

It was Big Louis who first discovered what interested them. A young man rose up in the boat and dove over the side. Apparently a marvelous swimmer, he forged on with rhythmic strokes toward the open sea. Soon he was a good half-mile from the beach.

Suddenly a faint but startled cry came back over the water, a cry in which they could just distinguish the word "Help!" They saw the curly head of the swimmer disappear beneath the surface, then a moment later reappear. The women screamed, and one of them rushed into the surf almost up to her neck.

"My son is drowning!"

The whole countryside seemed to echo her agonized cry. The younger woman stood help-

less, her eyes wide, her features working with fright.

Eve, also calling in a distracted voice for help, began to clamber down the rocks. There was not a vessel in sight, nor a fisherman or customs officer anywhere along the dike.

Then, from the top of the cliff Big Louis dove into the sea. For a moment he was lost in the foam.

Eve recovered her presence of mind. Yonder the boy in distress appeared and disappeared at intervals. She called out with all her strength, though aware that he could not hear her:

"Keep on—keep on! Some one is coming!"

She knew that the encouraging words would reach the ears of Big Louis.

The mother too continued to scream, as if she hoped by the strength of her voice to keep her son afloat until help should arrive.

The swimmer seemed to flounder, to change direction, to be drawn under the waves by a mysterious force, only to emerge again a little farther on. It was plain that he must be exhausted, and yet he had not lost his head; in spite of his incomprehensible detours he was making progress toward the boat.

"I see him—I see him!" cried Eve. "Courage! There he is . . . there, again! . . . *Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!* . . . Ah! . . . There he is! He's swimming . . . he's going ahead! Ah! . . . He's changing his course. . . . Big Louis, to the right! To the right!"

But before Big Louis could get to him the swimmer had reached the boat and hoisted himself over the side, where he collapsed, his face downward, his feet hanging over the top. There he lay motionless.

Eve was trembling now for Big Louis. Good swimmer though he was, could he make it to

the boat, or would he try to return to the beach? The ocean, while calm that day, was always foaming along this stretch of the coast, and the redoubtable rock of La Teignouse was not far off.

Happily the boy, who had suffered only a passing weakness, quickly rallied, straightened up, drew in his anchor and began to row to meet Big Louis. Finally they saw the latter pull himself into the boat.

The mother, between her sobs, was saying to Eve:

"I just knew that something would happen to him. He is only fifteen, mademoiselle, and so crazy about the sea! I had a presentiment of misfortune. While I was watching him swim out there so far from any help I seized my daughter's arm and said, 'Jacques is going to drown!' And it was just at that instant that he called."

They heard the boy shout, as soon as he was within hearing distance:

"A shark attacked me!"

The mother shrugged her shoulders a bit and murmured so that only Eve heard her:

"A shark! there are no sharks around here. . . . Poor little fellow, he must have been frightened by something . . . perhaps the seaweed . . . or cramps. . . ."

Big Louis, rowing with powerful strokes, drove the boat up on the sand and with his hands under the boy's armpits helped him out.

He was a sturdy youth, with a lively, handsome face and thick curly hair. There was blood on his legs. At sight of it his mother again began her lamentations.

But Big Louis shook his head and said, "It is nothing."

Eve, catching his glance, knew that he

wanted to reassure her. She stanched the blood with the handfuls of wet seaweed. The boy's wounds, which were superficial, ran like bracelets round his thighs. The blood was oozing from small holes regularly spaced, numerous but not deep.

He had been attacked by a dog-fish. That spring, fishermen returning to the land at nightfall, while following the channels in to shore, had now and then felt their boats lifted in an inexplicable manner, or had been surprised in the calm waters of the gulf by an eddy which they could not account for. Arrived at home, they would tell their wives that "devil-beasts" were now haunting those latitudes.

The good wives, familiar with the stories of specters of one sort or another that were always showing themselves at dusk, remained skeptical. They were not at all sure that their

husbands weren't trying to take advantage of their credulity. Besides, the men themselves, once safe by their firesides, were less certain of their own yarns.

Nevertheless, the skeleton of a "sea-beast" several meters long had been found on the Islet of Le Diance, out in the gulf. Its jawbone was carried to the neighboring prefecture; the creature was pronounced a "blueskin" shark, and bulletins were posted at the door of the mayor's office, warning bathers of the menace.

Seated on the edge of the boat, the boy, whose knees were still shaky, tried to laugh at his adventure. He described how he had attempted to throw the fish off the track by swimming zigzag and kicking at it whenever it drew near. He was elated by his new-found strength; his cheeks were flushed, as if by fever.

"You must put the boy to bed," declared Eve. "Don't let him excite himself too much. It would be better if you'd call the doctor."

Big Louis waited in the background. Nobody thought of him. The mother had not a word of thanks. He had resumed his stoical calm, as if he had already forgotten the part he had played in the drama. He was looking down in embarrassed fashion at the soaked clothing that clung to his big body.

The two women, whose faces were still wet with tears, supported the boy between them in spite of his protests, and set off with him toward the village.

Eve smiled tenderly at Big Louis, took his arm, and they returned to their house on the moor. She scurried about, kindling a fire to dry his clothes, and preparing their supper. Then she stood and served him while he ate.

That night she could not sleep. Restless,

her nerves on edge, she kept imagining fabulous creatures that hunched their bulk through the patches of moonlight on the floor. . . .

The next day, when she went for news, she found the boy lying on a sofa, making away with a hearty meal. His wounds were scarcely more than scratches. He refused to talk about the adventure, and made light of the danger he had escaped. But he inquired eagerly for Big Louis, and said, a bit shyly, that he would "go and chat with him" one of these days. Eve pressed his hand to let him know that she understood.

The mother took her aside and told her that during the night she had got up to see if her son was resting, and was at first unable to get into his room. He had pushed a chest against the door and strengthened the barri-

cade with chairs, a trunk, some bundles of faggots, anything that fell to his hand. And Eve knew that he also, lying sleepless, must have seen mythical beasts stealing out to threaten him.

Big Louis alone had slept his fathomless sleep.

XIV

Eve bought the rowboat, which the boy's mother now regarded with a superstitious dread. It was still sound, but Big Louis tarred it thoroughly and smoothed the inside with sandpaper. The blacksmith made him a new gig, and he set out every day to fish on his own account. His time of vagabondage was past; now he had to follow the movements of the tide. Sometimes he would be up before daylight, and when breakfast was ready Eve would call his name vainly at the foot of the stone stairway. He would by that time be far out at sea.

They subsisted now like the natives, mainly on fish and war bread. Their resources

diminished. It was particularly difficult to get wood. Eve, so hardy out-of-doors, could not endure the damp cold of the house, accustomed as she had been to overheated interiors. Her thin dresses were a constant astonishment to the countrywomen. And she kept the fire blazing from morning till night.

In this denuded country, daily flooded by the tide and strewn with fish-bones and scales, wood was scarce. Only pruned trunks remained of the forest which had bordered the fields. Many of the dying trees had crowns of foliage white and dry, insides hollow and crumbled, but nerves still tough as steel, though twisted with their long agony. These Big Louis chopped down. Each knot formed a billet which took hours to burn. He also uprooted stumps from the moor and brought in blocks to feed the fire. Eve's grateful smile rewarded him.

She found that she had to concern herself with his clothes, of which he was extremely careful, but which he would never have had the skill to mend. Vincente's husband, a customs officer whose uniform was furnished by the government, gave Big Louis a long new cape which he himself couldn't wear. Placing it on the other's broad shoulders, the little man nodded admiringly.

"You will be taken for the Captain making his rounds of the pier." The Captain was likewise very tall. Big Louis bore himself with an air of great assurance when he returned to the house.

He was no longer a charity guest, but one who contributed his share to the ménage. Eve, though she reproached herself for parsimony unworthy of the householder she was, did not refuse to take advantage of this assistance.

"Let him rehabilitate himself by helping," she thought.

On days when the catch was abundant he would go to the poor cottages along the coast, offering for sale the fish they did not need themselves.

On his return he would laugh happily as he fumbled in his pockets for the worn and wrinkled notes that were always given him in exchange. This money Eve put aside for him. People came to Landier, ostensibly looking for provisions. They were usually old, toil-bent women, wearing rusty merino dresses that were always neatly mended and that were always set off by coquettish white caps. These old ladies would come in and sit a minute with Eve, hardly venturing to rest their weight on the strange armchairs. With their hands crossed on their aprons they would recite the names of the young men killed in the war, in

the same tones they used when telling their beads. Their voices were sadly resigned, and interrupted by frequent dreaming silences.

Big Louis distributed the fish from the woodshed, which had become his particular headquarters. There he kept his net and some rude tools that he had collected. The shed was also his dressing-room. Every morning, stripped to the waist like a sailor, he washed himself, making a great splashing in the brackish water from the well. All his possessions were arranged with meticulous care. During his absences Eve sometimes opened the door to peer into the dim, half-subterranean retreat that was full of the clean odors of tar and dry wood.

When he went to sea he wore an old felt hat which he fastened under his chin. The rich blood of his cheeks showed faintly beneath the tan, and his eyes looked forth upon the

world with a serene trustfulness. Their expression had grown less vacant since he had taken up a more purposeful existence.

On rainy days he wore a long oiled coat. Thus equipped, with his gig or net over his shoulder, sometimes with his fishing boots slung over his arm, he would set forth. He usually returned with the well-filled basket balanced on his head. Whether going or coming he appeared to Eve a picturesque and powerful figure as she watched him from afar across the moor.

According to the condition of the sea she calculated the time of his return, and would often go to meet him. As the flow set in, the slopes of the basin disappeared by gradual stages beneath the long rhythmic swells that hissed and rustled as they mounted.

She could recognize his boat because it differed from those used by the other fishermen.

Most of them had low dories fitted with the red sails so well known along the coast. By twos and threes the men would set out for the deep water to fish for sardines. Usually they would spend the night at sea.

There was only one other craft like the one owned by Big Louis. This was a boat which belonged to an ex-sailor from the navy, a thin tubercular fellow whose vitality had been burned out beneath the hatches of ships, and who was too sick to risk the deep-sea fishing. Even at some distance he could be heard croaking like a poor wounded gull. When he was far out from shore it was by this faint hollow coughing that Eve could distinguish him.

When Big Louis did appear Eve would call to him from the top of the cliff. Though he made no gesture in answer, his powerful body would straighten, and she could guess by the carriage of his head that he was gazing

steadily toward her to acknowledge her greeting.

While waiting for the water to deepen so that he could make a landing he would put his craft in order, and with the slow and extreme care that characterized him, wash the inside of its boarding with great handfuls of seaweed. Once ashore he would plant the anchor firmly in the mud, collect his things and with long strides climb the path that led to the moor. Having joined Eve,he would put down his basket for her to appraise. On the days when it was heavy there would be an intense happiness in his expression. Then side by side they would go on toward the house. They did not question each other at all, for their joy in being together again needed no manifestation in words.

XV

She had decided one evening to accompany him the next day, but she was not sure that he understood. She arose early, afraid that he would leave without her.

The house, startled from its somnolence before the dawn, took on a new aspect, a curious living intimacy, as if it too had experienced a human awakening. There was the same reluctance to give up sleep, the same drowsy yawning peevishness. The air was hot and moist like a breath; the coverlets thrown back over the foot of the bed resembled cast-off clothing. The candle blinked; the shadows were full of whispers, and there was a child's prattle in the crackling of the morning

fire. Eve felt as if she were returning from a holiday; awaking, not in a strange place, but in a dear familiar room where she had just passed the night after a long absence.

When she opened the door he was standing there waiting, at his usual respectful distance, motionless and with his gaze fixed on the house. She felt a quick little throb of happiness because he had sensed that she wanted to go with him.

A dense fog shrouded the peninsula. They could see nothing before them; they two were the world. The tide was going out and already the skiff was stranded. Big Louis told her to get in, and without apparent effort pushed the boat down over the silt until it took the water.

Fortunately, he knew the channels, for otherwise they would doubtless have run aground and been prisoners until rising tide. Eve was not ignorant of the danger, but she

was reassured by the sight of Big Louis' serenity, as he rowed with his eyes upon the scarcely distinguishable fairways. Their customary rôles were exchanged; she was the docile passenger, he the one in command.

Almost immediately the sharp lines of the coast were blotted out, and the land they were leaving appeared like a dim gray cushion. The few scattered oak trees that still survived on the moor could be seen only as figures on a worn tapestry. The sun was a cold white lozenge suspended in the sky, a sun whose rayless pallor, glimpsed through the glacial fog that enwrapped her, made Eve sick at heart.

She regretted having started without her cloak, for her woolen dress seemed to drink up the dampness. No one had warned her that it would be cold at sea. There was no use expecting such foresight from Big Louis. Poor

Big Louis! Comprehension of a woman's comfort was far beyond his powers. He himself did not feel the cold. He whistled as he rowed. Eve crossed her arms tightly over her breast in the effort to warm the damp linen that seemed to cling to her skin. Her teeth chattered and her face was mottled with chill. She turned about and looked toward the open sea, feeling ready to cry.

Suddenly Big Louis abandoned his oars and motioned for her to get up. The narrow boat tipped and she had to catch hold of him as he edged past her. The space under the bow was walled to form a sort of chest. From it Big Louis drew his oilskin coat, which he shook out, and wrapped carefully about her. Then with a pressure of his hands on her shoulders he made her sit down again.

As he took up his oars his gaze rested upon her with a sort of grave approval. The high

collar of the coat covered half of her face, but he could see her eyes, and could read in them her gratitude.

He rowed for more than an hour. The gulf cleared, little by little, and because of the plants which appeared, took on the aspect of a prairie drenched with rain. Green, gray and blue tints mingled in a patina so oily and so deep that it resembled a vast marine canvas freshly painted, and laid out on the ground to dry.

They arrived at the buoy marking the great channel which crosses the bay, and along which the fishing is done. Big Louis moored the boat, for the waters were not yet low enough for him to distinguish the channel easily. They must wait.

Eve stretched out in the bottom, wrapped in the big coat. The waves washed against the sides with a monotonous beat that was

broken now and then by the dull thump of the boat against the buoy. Idly she began to set words to this cadence, and with it as a minor accompaniment she composed a song of joy, for never before had she felt such a sense of well-being, of security, of tranquil happiness. Her thoughts floated away into a half-sleep.

An exclamation from Big Louis roused her. A red sail was maneuvering at some distance. There were two men on board, to judge by the alternating voices. They were evidently having great difficulty in reaching the channel. It was necessary to find the proper current, and that called for speed and skill. Their brief words reached Eve through the mist as distinctly as if they were spoken at her ear.

Finally they succeeded in entering the channel. The triangular sail was lowered by means of a pulley. Instantly the younger man leaped

into the little skiff which was attached by a tow rope, and began to bail it out.

"It's going to be hot," said the other, addressing Eve and her companion with the simplicity of a gardener exchanging gossip with his neighbor over the hedge.

"Yes, if the fog lifts."

She recognized the two fishermen, father and son, from Port-Navalo.

Big Louis, who had been studying the water attentively, decided that it was time to begin. They pushed into the channel, as far as the Islet of Le Diance, which, arid and covered with dry grass, made a tawny spot in the gray expanse. They left behind them the square tower of the village, the seven chimneys of the château, the wharves of the salt marshes. The red sail also disappeared.

The fog lifted. Vision lost itself in the vast cyclorama of water spotted by patches of sea-

weed, like oases in a desert. Above depressions in the ocean floor the sea formed lazy pools, skirted by a thousand interlacing channels where the pulse of the tide could still be felt.

To these two whose souls were kin in their simplicity, it seemed that the whole human world had faded. When they stood up in the boat they felt as if they were towering high above the desolate waters and that by stretching their hands upward they could touch the gray sky that arched just above their heads.

In the bottom of the boat Eve found an old gig which might not be worth much, but which was light and which Big Louis must have brought for her use. Standing in the bow, he had already started to fish. With a mighty sweep he cast his gig into the transparent water, in whose depths could be seen clumps of seaweed where the eels lodged.

Eve tried to imitate him. He worked without stopping for breath. But the fish were shy. When he finally got one on the end of the gig he shouted "Ha!" and leaning over pulled it out of the water with a quick jerk. The eel thrashed about furiously while he unhooked it.

Eve was discouraged. She hadn't caught anything. Already her shoulders were sore and on her right hand were blisters which she mournfully showed to Big Louis. He gathered a handful of seaweed, wrung it out and wrapped it around her fingers. It cooled the burning. Just the same, the task was arduous. . . .

At last, when with a weary, mechanical gesture she had made a final cast, she felt something floundering at the end of the gig. In great excitement she drew from the water a silvery eel, pierced through and wriggling.

She uttered a sharp cry, and Big Louis hurried to help her.

Now her fatigue was forgotten. They fished for several hours. Big Louis had put on his high boots and was wading about in the shallow water, lifting his feet high and trying the bottom with his gig. Under the low sky he resembled some strange pilgrim of formidable stature. His carriage reminded her of the men who travel on snow-shoes in the North country, and she had a vision of blue shadows on the white between silhouetted trees.

When he returned to the boat the tide was rising in the channel, and they could fish no more.

She got out the provisions. Too tired to eat, she watched him while he cut the bread in great slices with his fishing knife. He opened the thermos bottle and with the wonder of a child watched the coffee steaming,

here in this desert of waters. With a touch of anxiety she followed his movements. He filled the mug, held it out to her and without showing any impatience studied her face while she drank. When she had finished he gravely took his share.

The tide was now high enough to allow them to start home. The afternoon was at its full, the sun was pouring down its hottest rays, but a breeze played like a fan upon the surface of the ocean. Over the edge of the boat Eve let her hand trail through the warm waves which seemed to have returned fresh and new from their journey into the limitless sea.

And this was Big Louis who was rowing. . . . Big Louis to whom she had entrusted herself. . . . Big Louis of the simple heart was bringing Eve back home.

XVI

DEATH plays a prominent rôle in the life of the living, in Breton land.

In the evening, after the angelus has sounded, the bell announces interments or burial services for the following day. Women, who at this hour sit knitting on the door-steps, if it is summer, never fail to murmur the name of the departed in a voice dusted with a little earth, a voice low in the twilight. If it is winter and they do not know the name, they open the noisy shutter and, leaning out, inquire of their neighbor who the dead man is. They have no time to walk, to loiter, or to rest, but their presence at funerals is a duty.

The cemetery is the most beautiful garden

in the village, a park that is public and sacred. It is the last stronghold for flowers of other days, blossoms now forgotten or untended, that create around the dead an atmosphere of ancient dreaming peace. During the bad season the marine plants seem to know, for they open of themselves in the green and spongy mold.

Even those who have no loved ones there are unwilling to miss their Sunday pilgrimage. They know each tomb, and the children spell out the names carved in large letters on the white crosses. The black crosses of the people of great age frighten the little ones, who are invariably astonished that any one could live so long.

The century-old ivy on the walls, the creak of the door on its rusty hinges, the stone font with its greenish water, the scent of the gilly-flowers, sweet scabious, larkspur, are familiar

to all. The cemetery is a projection of the home; one finds there an evanescent reminder like the musty fragrance of family papers. From continually hearing "So-and-So is dead" one finally comes to dread his own turn, or to congratulate himself upon still being alive. The gate to the shadows closes again; you can sleep in peace for another night. . . . A new list will appear to-morrow.

On the sunny plains which surround the cemetery, idle old men help their wives fold the linen. They stretch the white cloth between them, each putting his weight into the pull. Do they think of what the sheet will at last be used for?

The dead support their own ministrants. They have their bell-ringer, their carpenter, their grave-diggers, their carvers of tombstones, whose trades are assured, if not prosperous. A doctor is rarely called to the sick-

bed; at the last breath these entrepreneurs of death rush in to claim their task.

Perhaps while the man is alive nobody thinks it worth while to visit him. But once the ceremonial toilet has been made and the silent host dressed for the grave, the whole village runs to flutter the brush of the holy water over the black-clad form. The women lift the little children in their arms, so that by the flickering light of one poor candle they may kiss the face of the dead. The odor of wax mingles with the odor of death; childhood does not distinguish the one from the other, and the two become for ever inseparable in the long march of memory. Perhaps that is why, here in the country, there is so much deliberation, so much dreaming, so much fear, in the gesture with which one lights the evening candle.

Oh, the petty concerns of death! Here is

the layer-out of the dead, who knows beforehand when the sick man is doomed, and who goes to his bed fully dressed, to await the call; here is she who recites the chaplet while she watches; there is he who prays in a loud voice at the tomb; here is the sorrowing one who inherits the relics.

They believe in the return of spirits, in reincarnation. If a child dies the mother gives his name to her next baby, in the conviction that the soul of the dead child dwells in the body of the new-born.

In winter, especially, all the land is the domain of phantoms which flit about in the drift of fog and wind. At night stray animals are sacred. Every one knows that fishermen return to earth clothed in the skins of beasts, to expiate their sins. A sheep bleating in the moonlight near an abandoned mill is the dead miller, who in other days cheated in the weight

of a sack of flower. A miller generally has so many mouths to feed! One must ease his way by prayer. . . . And a soul in agony dwells in that beast, half dog, half wolf, with the slathering tongue and the eyes of fire, met in the dusk where the roads cross.

Eve was grateful to Big Louis for his presence, for to be alone in this country is to be already on the way to death. . . . She could not entirely escape the clustering superstitions, the aura of ancient legend. And this is the idea which had at first touched her imagination, then gradually, and despite her logic, grown to be at times a belief: Big Louis was himself a reincarnation. This man of shadows was the soul of the North returned to earth for redemption. He who yonder in that far white land had made vaunt of his culture, who had spoken of it as a field where one loiters and grows wise, was living again

in utter simplicity of mind. The sovereign of former days, masterless and invincible, had in his new existence no free will, desire or judgment. He was no more than a straw in the harvest. . . .

She was displeased with this conception. It maligned the mysterious personality of Big Louis, maligned his natural dignity, his inner life, suspended but existent. After some time it had become possible for her to reconcile her heart to a love that had passed, but which she realized was not forgotten. She even found a physical resemblance between this phantom of the present and the phantom of the past.

Of the past. . . . She recalled how they had parted. There had been no quarrel; the strong rarely quarrel. He told her by telephone that he had just been commissioned by the government to make a tour of inspection among the advance posts of the fur trade,

scattered along the arctic confines. The project, which had been developing for some time, had just come to a head. . . . He had not spoken of it sooner, since he was not sure. . . . But now . . . The trip would last at least a year. . . . The sport and adventure of it tempted him too, of course, but—well, in view of business. . . .

Even to-day the word "business" made Eve smile sadly. It was the shibboleth with which men cover all their schemes, their defections, their sprees. The great escape: business. They may be rich and free, with an existence shared among club, golf-course, race-track, yet when they are seized by the merciless lust for change, for new trappings for the worldly scene, they cast into the faces of the importunate—that is to say, of their creditors or their women—that magic word, business. And it would be shocking, particularly on the part

of the women, to question them. . . . The white wolf steals away to his hills of ice. . . .

At the same time that he announced to Eve his impending departure, as if it were merely the question of a hunting party for the week-end, he asked her to dine with him at a certain famous restaurant. The music, he said, was good. . . .

The blow was atrocious, but she had been well schooled. She dressed with care. He came for her, rang the bell at the entrance and waited below until she was ready. They greeted each other with an unaccustomed gaiety. He walked fast, his head high, his gaze already remote, a half-smile hovering on his lips. Conquering youth was in the set of his shoulders; he had not lived at all; the long future lay before him. . . . Eve would be only an episode which he would soon begin to forget. . . .

He wore a fur overcoat which she did not recognize; doubtless one bought for the northern trip. It seemed to her too new, too big, somehow crass and vulgar. She had a momentary feeling of repulsion against this man who could be so cruel in his self-assurance. She laughingly complained of having to run to keep up with him. To be sure, that light voice did not belong to her; that evening, some one else was speaking, acting in her place. Her true self was only a bleeding wound. . . .

He relaxed his pace immediately with a murmur of apology, the old solicitude in his voice. At the same time he took her arm. In the depths of herself she asked mercy. . . .

During the dinner, they exchanged the idle talk of people whose conversation must harmonize with an atmosphere burdened to the point of nausea with perfumes, light and music. The air vibrated painfully over

strained nerves. It was as if some one were singing in an artificial voice, shrill and false. The departure, the adventurous voyage, the long absence were not even mentioned.

He took her home, seized her for an instant in his arms without a word, and went away as one who makes an escape, with no glance back.

She never saw him again. She had had no news of him. Years passed. . . .

She told herself that she had never understood him. Was he like so many men of his race, born for pleasure, for the blind pursuit of money, for gross enjoyment? Why had he taken so much trouble to win her? Why, from their first meeting at the time of his initial trip to France, had he indulged such fanaticism for the North country? In his restless heart grew the germs of what secret nostalgia?

There had been no explanation. She knew

that there can be none for cruelty of the soul. Nevertheless she would never be bitter against him. She recalled with emotion this gesture, that word. . . . When by one of his inexplicable bouts of dissipation he had made her suffer, he knelt before her and leaned his head upon her motionless hands, whispering to her, in his own language, with an untranslatable expression of tenderness and reverence.

Eve had forgiven him. And so it was that to her amazement she found herself confusing him with Big Louis. The renegade of the arctic spaces had returned, and she had encountered his repentant gaze across the mists of the moor.

XVII

In the evening, Big Louis sometimes came and peered over her shoulder. She amused herself by reading aloud what she had written. When she was satisfied with it, she would say simply:

"It's good, isn't it, Big Louis?"

He would nod his head and repeat after her:

"It's good, isn't it?"

She could not have endured the presence of any one else at her side during the birth of the poem. In order to give life, absence of life was necessary. Big Louis was only an element of the surroundings. He blended into the neutrality of things.

Poetry flowed from this land as a spring

from the rocks. The mind became a church, austere and high and solitary, on whose flagstones knelt devotees come to pray for the miracle of beauty. But Eve knew that first of all she must complete her task of self-exploration, and bring into the light all the burrowing thoughts that confused her. She suspected that the effort was hopeless, but with the punctuality of the good workman she took it up each day, without ennui as without enthusiasm. And, until now, that had sufficed to keep her existence free from any appearance of idleness.

Big Louis listened when she read. His voice followed hers in a sort of cadenced melody without words, a chant in which she caught the echoed rhythm of her verse. At other times he touched the keys of the piano tenderly, in an effort to accompany her.

The accuracy of his ear was noticeable. Eve

heard him whistling on the moor, reproducing the song of the skylark and the cries of the sea-gulls and plovers. In the evening when he gave a grand concert in the cottage she would demand the whole repertoire, and if she did not instantly declare that the wind which he imitated was actually whistling through the fir-trees or under the door or down the chimney, he would gaze at her in deep reproach.

One day when he had met the postman he came running to her, with a letter in his hand. As he wrinkled his brow in an effort to understand the address, his eyes appeared darker under the ridged forehead. He followed the writing with his finger until he reached the word "Eve." For the first time he pronounced her name. His voice was low and uncertain, but as if enchanted by his discovery he repeated, "Eve . . . Eve." . . . Troubled, she

urged him to read all that was on the envelope, but he went no further than that single word "Eve," on which her finger rested.

She concluded that he must once have known how to read. The cataclysm which had drowned his brain had claimed that too, like all the rest. She traced in large characters the letters of the alphabet; then she made him sit by her, and the lesson began. He got tired quickly, confused the letters, and finally let his head fall forward on the table. The day had been hard. . . . He roused himself for a moment, but soon fell asleep, as he often did in the evening, stretched out on the floor at Eve's feet, guarding her against the darkness. For him there was no high barrier between the life of his consciousness and the life of his dreams. When he slept the same faint smile lingered on his lips that had been there while he was talking, and when he awoke again his

features kept their curious, distrait expression, like that of a blind man who receives his light from within.

She was not discouraged. Again and again during the following weeks she renewed the test. She sent for a spelling book, lavishly illustrated, in which he instantly recognized each picture.

With his man-child joy at having done well he would exclaim: "W, the wolf; D, the dog; S, the sheep. . . ."

But she saw clearly that he could not go much further. When he tried to join the letters to form words, all the preceding gains counted for nothing.

Abandoning the reading, she began to tell him the simplest fables, with the aid of his pictures. But when the main point of the story reached his understanding he had an astonishing way of upsetting the beautiful plan.

"When the stork, in his turn, invited the wolf to dinner——"

He shook his head; "No, no."

"But I say yes, Big Louis."

"No."

"But why not?"

"The wolf ate the stork for *his* dinner."

She laughed at his simple logic, and was surprised that he had spoken at such length. She tried another myth: "Between a lion's paws, a mouse ran out from the earth——"

She got no further. Big Louis' gaze was full of reproach: why did she persist in such absurd hypotheses?

Nevertheless, the effort bore fruit. He began of his own accord to leaf through the several illustrated books that he found in the cottage. In the evenings he spent long hours under the lamplight, studying a single engraving.

One of them especially held his attention, doubtless because of its colors. It represented Anne of Brittany, with a flat cap under her crown. She was seated in a high-backed arm-chair, receiving the homage of a knight, who knelt before her with bowed head.

"Queen Anne," said Eve softly.

He repeated, wonderingly, "Queen Anne!"

He acquired a habit of carving, with his jack-knife, wooden replicas of the animals in his books. At first it would have been difficult to tell what these crude carvings represented. When he had gone out, Eve, with a great pity in her heart, would take in her hands the formless objects upon which he had spent so much pains. Her fingers caressed them, warmed them, as if to bring them to life. Sometimes she held them against her cheek, and with her elbows resting on the table, sat dreaming.

His execution became more and more skilful. Finally the artist closed the book, and worked according to his own inspiration. Eve took a quiet pleasure in watching the movements of his long pliant fingers, under whose touch the wooden blocks took form. Soon along the top of the bookcase stretched a procession of little animals like the figures in a nursery frieze.

XVIII

Big Louis brought the illusion of peace. There was peace in his eyes, clear as still water; peace in his unruffled forehead; peace in the strong curve of his lips—lips that were rarely distorted by human emotion. He never laughed boisterously; he was never impatient, and irritation seldom showed in his face. But that he was sensitive to insult and capable of terrible anger had been proved when the strange fishermen had annoyed him.

He was also susceptible to a curious inner gaiety, which probably he himself did not understand, but which had been manifest to Eve that May morning when he had stood with her on the peak of Le Petit-Mont, as if it

were the top of the world. Yet essentially he was calm, and his serenity seemed to communicate itself to those about him. His gestures were infrequent, especially for one who might have been tempted to resort to signs because of his poverty of speech. From their rarity they acquired emphasis.

His voice was strangely deep and rich, with a muted strength. Its eloquence did not depend upon the words—which it touched rather than pronounced—but upon its inflection. His spirit breathed in his voice, and the anguish which it at times betrayed was as moving as a cry for help in the night.

To the most simple chores of their daily existence he brought gravity, industry, and a sort of sober joy. He gave himself up completely to the task of the moment. To arrange the logs in the fireplace so as to get the most heat from them, or to bring water from the

well without spilling a drop, was for him an art. It made him happy to watch some simple object grow to usefulness under the creative touch of his fingers or even, indeed, only to feel the sharp sea-wind on his face as he stood on the door-step.

But there was a deeper and more mysterious joy which smoldered in the deep zone of his heart, and which he could never have analyzed; the certainty of a presence near him, of a life intermingled with his own. Suddenly he would lift his eyes toward a vision in the high-backed chair, and in a kind of bewilderment stammer something in which the names of Eve and Queen Anne were inextricably confused.

And the woman could divine his thought merely through a prolonged look which he allowed to rest upon her, a slight inclination of his head, a frown, or the movement of his

expressive fingers. At first she had talked to him a great deal, questioned him and tried to make him answer. But there came a day when she realized with astonishment that she had become almost as silent and inarticulate as he. Somehow the revelation terrified her. She cried his name, uttered exclamations without meaning, sang at the top of her voice, as if to shake the very walls. He let the outbreak pass, a smile flickering on his lips.

It was chiefly with their eyes that they talked to each other. In default of other joys that communion had been given them. They looked at each other frankly, openly, unself-consciously, for their gaze never sought to ingratiate but only to discover and understand.

She could foretell the moment when he would rise from his reverie in the chimney corner and with a shake of his numbed limbs

stride forth in any sort of weather for his swift walk over the moor. She could guess when he wanted to eat, to sleep, to hear her voice, or when her absorption in her papers was beginning to worry him. Instinctively she would raise her head, or go and take from his hand the figure he was carving. Sometimes it was sufficient to reassure him if she simply pronounced his name.

She could read in his eyes his joy that she was there. For she could not leave him for an instant. He might spend whole days fishing, or tramping in the country, but once back home he dogged her steps. If she went to town on some errand, or to Vincente's home, where the youngest baby was her godson, on her return she would find him at the gate, waiting for her. He would take her hand like a child, and all evening long would follow her about with a worried air.

Since he had deciphered her name on the envelope he had been calling her Eve. When she returned to the house and went to the back room to prepare their meal, he was like a sick person, calling her until she came to see what was the matter. He only wanted to be sure that she was not going away again.

She would scold him a little, and he would be comforted. They would stand a minute, face to face, silent before the fireplace, their figures grown taller in the half-darkness. The man's powerful body seemed to sway imperceptibly to the rhythm of the ocean. Then Eve would tear herself from the shadows and return to her task. This giant who had for so long roamed the night, who ventured out to sea in the thickest of weather, who had already given proof of his courage, suddenly showed strange and childish fears.

Sometimes he would start from his sleep,

a prey to hallucinations. At such times he would point in terror toward the door, or to the swaying curtain of the alcove, or to a shadowed angle of the wall. Then Eve would exercise all her authority, and lead him straight to the spot where he thought the thing that frightened him was lurking.

"You see, Big Louis, there's nothing there."

"*There,* behind!"

And she would have to open the door. When it was stormy, everything outside was so black, so mysterious and so oppressive that the night seemed a huge, darkly luxuriant tree whose leaves dropped low and flapped against her face. Involuntarily she would raise her hands to fend it off. Then, shivering, she would slam the door and catch hold of Big Louis' arm to reassure herself.

These crises grew less and less frequent and never lasted long. He would pass his hand

over his forehead and calmness would return to his startled eyes. But she noticed that he no longer stretched out on the rug, as at first. And when she looked at the clock and murmured, "It's time, Big Louis," he got up docilely, raised his fingers to his temple with a peculiar gesture that meant "Good night," and without looking back stepped out into the darkness of the moor. She would watch him as he walked toward the granary. When once he felt himself alone his shoulders drooped a little, as if he were carrying a burden. She could hear him mount the stone stairs, and hear the floor above her head creak under his step. Then she would fall asleep contentedly, for she was no longer afraid.

He was unhappy only when she demanded of him an effort of thought, of memory or reflection, beyond his powers. And Eve would reproach herself for hoping for a miracle and for making him suffer needlessly.

While he worked he whistled softly or crooned to himself. She could tell by his quickened and more excited breathing just when he was near success in one of his naive undertakings.

He could not find words for what he wanted to say. It was as if his thought hung suspended at the edge of his brain, lacking power to take flight. Some vital connection was broken, but there remained the confused notion that there was something he must express. He would stand with lips parted, his gaze turned inward, until she relieved him by pronouncing the word that he could not recall.

When he was out-of-doors he would often forget what he had come for, or where he had intended to go. Sometimes he would start as if from a daze, and find himself headed for the village with his oar over his shoulder, or descending the rocky path, carrying the pail with which he drew water from the well.

While on an errand, he would seem to awake abruptly, and close his fingers tightly over the money which Eve had given him for some small purchase.

He would hear, like an echo in his consciousness, the sound of her voice at the gate, giving brief, slightly imperious instructions, always softened, however, by her smile or her quick laughter. Yet no matter how hard he tried, he could not remember. The words were smothered in some quicksand of his memory. But at least he now realized that he was forgetful—and that in itself was progress. Instead of going on, aimlessly as a lost dog, while he worried and grew panic-stricken trying to recall the purpose of his errand, he would return to Eve, who always laughed indulgently and repeated her orders. And he knew that she had become his guide along the meanderings of a strange and bewildering road.

XIX

It was the anniversary of the Armistice. All Saints' Day was past, but its spirit seemed to have returned, with its mystical evocations. The dead were retracing their steps, to knock once more at the door of memory, and the living opened to them in fear.

Rain had been falling since morning, a rain thick and soft as chrysanthemum petals. Sticky mud covered the paths. Eve went out despite the bad weather. That terrible nostalgia of the snows tortured her; the crystal land, now so far away, rang its metallic carillon in her ears, dazzled her eyes with its cruel white light, breathed over her the lustral fragrance of the flakes that drifted down like

miraculous pollen. She invoked again the nights of turgid crimson skies, nights full of silken voices that were perhaps the rustling of the gowns of women in that visionary city, returning from the theater along streets edged with rows of stars. . . .

Eve came back from her walk chilled. Her throat was sore, and her whole body ached. The rest of the day passed miserably.

Big Louis ate his supper alone in the back room. Several times he came to the door to look in at her. He realized that there was something out of order in the mechanism of the household, but it was beyond him to find the cause of the trouble or to imagine a remedy.

When he had finished eating, he rejoined her. She did not take her accustomed place, but sat in the big armchair near the fire, with cushions piled around her and her feet on a

wooden bench which Big Louis had made. A current of icy air flowed between the door and the fireplace. A candle lighted the room dimly.

He hesitated, then awkwardly placed the lamp on the table, but did not light it.

"We will not sit up this evening," she said. "Eve is sick. . . . You understand, Big Louis, I am sick."

She tapped her chest. Her voice was plaintive.

He sat down on the bench by her feet.

"Sick?" He touched his forehead.

"Yes, sick all over," she replied, indicating her throat and her chest.

He understood that she must feel in her head that same frightful hammering which he himself remembered in a dim curious way, as if he were not quite sure whether he or some one else had experienced it. But he had no idea how to relieve it.

He began to build up the fire, knowing well that she loved its warmth and brightness about her. When the glow from the flame touched her pale face he was childishly happy, in the conviction that she would soon emerge from her strange immobility. He no longer recognized her, swathed as she was in shawls and banked in cushions. At the same time her dolorous figure stirred a ghost in his memory; a vague, long-forgotten image of past suffering. He got up uneasily and went to find his picture book.

Eve made an effort to pull herself together. She was more affected by the dreariness of the day than by any actual illness. The gray discouragement of the rain seemed to creep into the room.

She thought of her young brother, of the handsome boy whom death had snatched from so many bright promises of the future. Had he lived he would be a man now, and close to her.

He would fill the house on the moor with the activity and joy of life that in other days he had brought at holiday time to the old home. Heretofore she had believed in the necessity and in the sanctity of sacrifice. Now in this malaise of body and spirit everything had become confused. Patriotism was, after all, no more than a bleeding sword suspended above young heads. . . .

She must regain her sane vision of things. Doubtless to-day she was affected by the sick person's undue sensitivity to surroundings. For those who had lost some one in the war this catafalque, which was the Armistice, was draped in a mortuary cloth woven of solitude, grief and silence. There was a somber grandeur in the devotion with which the whole world performed the rites; each one counted his dead in the sudden stillness of the battlefield.

Her meditations were interrupted when Big

Louis came in. He had found the usual materials of his evenings—his knife, his book, and some bits of wood, which he placed on the hearth.

He sat down again on the bench and placed his book on Eve's knees. It opened of itself to the picture of Queen Anne, whom he contemplated as if he were seeing her for the first time. His eyes strayed from the picture to Eve's face. But her gaze passed over his head to lose itself in the sad twilight.

He let his book slide down.

"Do not cry," he said.

His hesitant voice was more gentle than ever before.

She started from her reverie, and laughed a bit nervously, passing her fingers over her face. No, she was not crying; her cheeks were cold and dry. But his mystical clairvoyance had seen the internal tears. . . .

The past had been drawing her back into itself. Nothing there for her! . . . Her sadness fled like a sigh of the wind, and she woke to a sense of the present.

"Eve is a fool, my Louis. After all, she has not changed. Insatiable. . . . One is never cured. . . . Philosophy is only a plaster on an old, old wound. . . . But you are there . . . very much alive . . . and faithful. It is that alone that matters."

She spoke in short clipped phrases which she felt that he must comprehend; phrases that fell like burning drops upon his face. His big body swayed slightly, shaken by a force that encompassed him, but which he could not understand.

Calm returned to her spirit. The candle sputtered on the table and flickered out; the logs on the hearth, piled high against each other, formed a glowing tower.

Big Louis dropped his head on Eve's knees with a sort of stifled sob. Their rôles were re-established. . . .

The quiescent hands of the woman rested on the coarse silk of his hair, and she knew that her soul was again in command. As before, a flaky silence fell upon the world.

XX

Eve woke in a small, muddled chamber in Paris. There were clothes hanging from hooks on the wall, books in a pile on the floor. Despite the incongruous furnishings, the room exhaled the freshness of the country. The clean white curtains of the windows still smelled of drying in the open air. A toilet table with charming crystal vials stood in a corner. One could hear the homely ticking of a clock somewhere in the house. The hour sounded, like the muffled voice of a sorceress imprisoned in the oaken chest.

Eve was visiting a childhood friend, who had been living in Paris since her husband died.

At the station the two women hadn't been troubled with baggage. Eve's preparations had been made in haste. She had had no trunk to bring down the stone stairs from the granary, back yonder. . . . To bring a trunk bumping down the steps is a little like bringing down a coffin. And it is he who stays behind that generally makes it bump; he who is going away lifts it with an impatient haste to be off. Between the two there is already this cumbersome physical barrier that materializes the separation. A trunk represents not only the clothes packed in it, but something else as well; a bit of yourself that is departing, not to return. The sorrow of those left behind weighs on the lid like a funeral garland.

So, Big Louis did not have to help bring down the trunk. He was gentle and silent, as always, the morning of Eve's departure. She entrusted him to Vincente; he would sleep at

the house on the moor, and take his meals with Vincente and her husband.

Eve did not want to confess that she was running away. No, she was leaving Port-Navalo merely for a change of air. The phantasmal atmosphere of the moor was beginning to exercise too much influence upon her.

And from that atmosphere a vision emerged, a figure formidable, but with all its primitive traits softened by the mists.

For a long time she had thought she was watching over him with a detached solicitude. The interest he inspired in her was to be explained by her need of a human presence. They had lived at each other's side. His habit of seizing her hand at times of anxiety had for a long time awakened no emotion in her. He had sat with her so many evenings, so close that she could feel his breath on her face, and she had tranquilly continued her work.

But now . . .

That night when he had bowed his head on her knees. . . . She remembered the fever in her hands, the hot desire of her fingers to imprison his face, to slip down along the strong, straight column of his neck where it emerged from the worn collar of his jacket. She remembered her longing to bend over him . . . he would have raised his head——

She had not been deceived in the cause of his worry. The clasp of his arms, finally thrown about her, and his muffled sob, told the story.

That night, tormented in body and soul, she could not sleep. Remembrance came to her of the first man who had made an impression on her heart, when she was a child.

It happened when she was spending the holidays with her grandparents. One day she was romping on the beach, intoxicated with the

sun and the wind, when a tall silhouette detached itself from the smooth background of the sand. She no longer remembered his features or his voice; she only recalled that in his white uniform, so unexpected in this severe country, he was different from the fishermen and the shepherds. Listening to him talk, she discovered a new language.

People called him the "Colonial." They became great friends, with conscious adoration on her part and idle amusement on his.

Life separated them. Eve was sent to a boarding school; the stranger too went away, pulling the tousled hair of the gipsy child as he said his careless good-by.

She returned, a young woman, on the day of her grandfather's burial. At the cemetery she knelt while they lowered the coffin into the grave, astonished and contrite at not being more sorrowful. Near by was a tomb of

white marble. The sun played on the carved letters of an inscription, which she read mechanically:

Here lies Philip Leloir, Lieutenant of the
8th Regiment of Colonial Infantry,
deceased at Dakar in his
twenty-sixth year.

Her first love. . . .

Was it a symbol? Was she destined to see marble cover them all, one after the other?

"Here lies . . ."

This new love which possessed her, was it not doomed to destruction, since its object was only a poor changeling of nature and of reason?

"Here lies . . ."

At the same time an inner exaltation possessed her, an ineffable happiness whose intensity effaced the doubts, the anguish and the terrors.

She had played with the strings of her heart, twisted them, tangled them, stretched them, sometimes broken them. Now a mysterious power had put them in tune again, like the strings of a harp. Her fingers had only to return to their music. . . .

XXI

She imposed upon herself the stay in Paris as one prescribes a respite on the eve of a decision certain to be made, which in fact has already been made, but which one postpones acknowledging in order to indulge the illusion of free will. She wanted to see clearly within herself, to get rid of the enchantment of the moor, for the moment to expel Big Louis from her thoughts.

And here, while he was far from her, he was entrenching himself the deeper. He created in the Parisian atmosphere a misty islet to which he drew her. She saw him above the crowd. His look, his smile, his voice haunted her.

In order to resist him she plunged into the

life of the city, with absorbing work by day, excitement and gaiety in the evening, the friendship of women and the camaraderie of men. As in the past she urged her body along the towpath of the great busy stream, drawing, like the others, her laden boat. And when the time for pleasure came, she would go out in satin slippers to take her place in the restless and barbaric mosaic of the streets.

Lingering in bed in the morning, she was surprised by a perverse regret over not having to get up as usual. Then the brisk walk in the cold, where her body seemed to be breaking through a thin crystal screen, her face offered to the caress of the snowflakes, her heart acquiescent to the persuasion of dreams!

Breaking her absorption by its abrupt reality the publishers' building would rise before her, so suddenly as to seem to hurl itself upon her—a huge stone hulk quivering with the ro-

tation of the presses, permeated with the odor of paper, obstreperous with its clicking of typewriters and the jingling of telephones. Here was a cure for dreams!

Or again, she would muse upon the vision of the street at night, brilliantly lighted, stretching away like a warm corridor with its gleaming rows of theaters and the hot odors from its restaurants. And she sought diversion in the companions at her side.

In vain. When you have once given up this kind of life you do not return to it, just as you do not don a gown with brilliant spangles which has been allowed to tarnish in the closet.

She had expected a conflict with herself, a debate upon the pros and cons, a perplexed decision to remain in Paris or to return to Port-Navalo. But the problem did not arise. She knew that her place was yonder on the promontory of the moor, where some one came

faithfully each day to stand on tiptoe before closed windows. The return would be not a solution but a natural action, quite in harmony with things; a departure calls for a return.

At any rate there was no necessity for hastening the hour.

XXII

A LETTER came. The envelope was addressed with pencil, in a careful hand. Vincente wrote: "Ma chère Demoiselle,

"I hope that you receive in good order the papers and letters which I have had forwarded to you. The postman puts them at your door, but as it rains a great deal here now, the water gets in the corridor a little, and your papers are sometimes soggy. All this rain is very annoying on account of the washing. I put my wash out to dry at Landier, as you told me to and I don't know how many times I have had to do the things over again. With your godson on my arm, and little Jean who is becoming so active, it's not easy. Fortunately Madec,

poor man, comes with me when he is not on duty and helps me fold the clothes and wheel the wheelbarrow. Our eldest stays to study for a diploma next year, and I don't like to bother her even when I need her. However she is very industrious. We are all in good health, chère Demoiselle, but many people are not in the same state, on account of the grippe epidemic. Two in the customs service have died, taken in a few days, two young men you didn't know. Fortunately they weren't married. Allanic is gone too—the old man who split your cord of wood last winter. It is the men especially who are victims. They say that at the Marine Hospital at Lorient there are funerals every day, young people from eighteen to twenty years, it's a pity. At Sarjean and at Vannes, it's the same. The doctor at Port Lichan told Madec that it's like a plague after the war. So, ma chère Demoiselle, even

though we are eager to see you, it's much better to stay on at Paris. A bad cold is caught so quickly. The wind roars so over the moor this winter. We will take care of your house as if you were there, and open things up as soon as there is a minute of sunshine. Yvonne comes with me when she is not at school, but she's very careful to leave her sabots at the door.

"Big Louis has moved out again. I don't know whether he has been at Landier since you left. He hasn't eaten at my house for several days. We are uneasy. But you know how he is. . . ."

The rest of the letter floated off into haze.

But several individual sentences were sharp before her eyes: "It is the men especially who are victims. . . . He hasn't eaten at my house for several days. . . ."

What worried her particularly was that he

no longer slept in the granary which had become his apartment, the place where he went to shave, and where he kept his own things. Surely he had been reclaimed very easily by his vagabond habits. . . .

A sad phantasm of the past flashed before her—a vision of letters carved on marble. She rejected the implication of this macabre symbol as ugly, brutal, unreasonable. It was, she reflected, only the result of her incorrigible penchant for dramatizing everything.

She left Paris that very evening. During the long night she tried vainly to sleep, and fought to keep herself from setting lugubrious prophecies to the cadenced pounding of the train. But her mind seemed to project itself far along the polished rails, on which a single thought beat its refrain: "Here lies . . . Here lies . . ."

The way seemed full of frightful descents,

and each tunnel was anguish. She must grasp something for support. . . . A catastrophe was impending. . . . In a daze she watched the sleepy faces of the other travelers.

With daybreak the nightmare was routed. At seven o'clock the train entered the station at Vannes. There was still a long trip before her to Port-Navalo, by the local line which meandered through the country like a landlord who asks one to admire his estate, and whose slowness exasperates all who are in a hurry. But to Eve this deliberation was welcome, after the mad course of the night. The sight of the furze was like the caress of delicate fingers on a tired and worried face.

She arrived at eleven o'clock. The court of the tiny station, with its rosemary ruffled by the breeze, was deserted. She took the path which skirted the coast, and which was bordered by inhabited villas whose gay façades

would not be likely to cast bad news in her face.

Without hesitation she mounted the stone steps. The granary was empty. A seaman's cap lay on the bed. The coverlets were carefully folded.

Disconsolate but at the same time reassured, she descended the stairs and entered the house. She opened the shutters of the big room, and then having hastily changed from her traveling clothes, closed the door behind her and set out for Vincente's cottage.

Vincente was preparing the soup for the noon meal. The baby was sleeping in the cradle, but little Jean was stamping and pulling at his mother's dress.

"Mademoiselle Eve! . . . Something told me you would come in a hurry. If we had known we'd have gone to the station to meet you. You must be very tired. You must stay

and eat with us. I was just fixing the soup, but the bread is still so bad that it crumbles."

She dusted a chair with her apron and pushed it toward Eve.

"No, no, I can't stay. I only came to say hello and to kiss my godson. He is superb—and Master Jean has grown. . . . In two weeks. . . . Have you seen Big Louis?"

Vincente let her knife fall on the table, and with one stroke collected the bread crumbs which she put in a tureen.

She lowered her voice a little: "Poor fellow. . . . He is sick. Doubtless the grippe, mademoiselle. We were going to write you. We just found out yesterday. As I told you in my letter we hadn't seen him lately. The customs officer on duty along the coast found him at the old post—you know, near the semaphore — lying on a bed of sea-wrack. Madec went there yesterday evening. One

can't abandon him like a dog, even if we must be prudent, you understand, on account of the children. He seems to have a cough. I was going to take him something to eat to-day."

"I'll go myself, Vincente. When I come back I'll tell you how things are. No doubt I shall need you."

"All right, mademoiselle. Just the same I'll give you a little bouillon to take along. It'll do him good."

The old post was a half-hour's walk distant. It was a small sturdy cottage which had belonged to the customs service, reached by following the coast, along a path overgrown with brake and furze. It had a doorway, but no door, and an oval window looking out on the sea. Inside, along the wall, was a sort of bench, covered with dry seaweed, where the men slept while waiting their turn to take the watch. The table which had formerly sup-

ported the register remained. A lantern stood on the mantel, and in a corner were some life-buoys.

Eve saw Big Louis stretched out on the bench, fully dressed. Doubtless he was sleeping. His cloak was thrown over him. She could not see his face, which was turned to the wall, but she could hear him breathing.

Completely mistress of herself, she entered and placed her hand on his shoulder.

He turned slowly. A thin beard covered the lower part of his face; his skin was pink at the cheeks, but waxy about the mouth. Probably the fever had subsided, for his gaze revealed only a deep lassitude.

He looked at her for a long time with no flicker of recognition. Then gradually comprehension of her presence began to filter into his consciousness; his eyes grew wide with happy understanding, then closed for a moment as if to keep her image from escaping.

He must have been in this refuge for some time, perhaps ever since her departure for Paris. There were ashes on the fireplace, and on the table beside a chunk of moldy bread was a bowl of withered flowers. Eve recognized the bowl as the one Big Louis used at breakfast in the house at Landier.

The cottage did not give the impression of squalor. Although it had been abandoned for several years, it was still clean. With its whitewashed walls, and its oval window framing the dark blue sea, it resembled a pilgrim's chapel. A model of a three-master, the handiwork of some vanished sailor, hung from the ceiling like a votive offering.

Eve poured the bouillon into the bowl, raised Big Louis by his shoulders, and, letting him lean against her, made him drink. Then she pulled the cloak up again around his neck.

He did not seem to be very sick, but rather

to be extremely weak. He made an effort to talk, but stammered even more than usual.

"Sh! . . . You must keep very quiet. Eve has come back, my Louis. Everything will be all right. . . . Go to sleep."

When she started to leave he seized her hand, with the old expression of distress and perplexity.

"I will come back, but I must get medicine . . . and blankets . . . we must have a fire. Madec will be here in a minute. . . . Do you understand?"

He lay back again, reassured, with his hands crossed on his breast.

There was no doctor at Port-Navalo. The one from Sarjean came twice a week, but this was not his day.

Eve instantly decided to call upon Monsieur de Pontbihan. Every one knew that the old physician no longer practised, that he was not

a native of the country, and that he refused to visit even the dying. Yet she was sure he would come. They had often met on their walks, and lately he had formed the habit of accompanying her home.

She arrived at the doctor's house. The garden gate was open. A sturdy servant girl, fresh and rosy, was wringing out clothes from a tub in the shelter of a clump of hydrangeas. Pushing back the blonde hair from her eyes she scrutinized Eve curiously.

"Is the doctor in? I should like to have a word with him."

"He left after lunch, some time ago."

"Which way did he go?"

"Oh, I couldn't say. One never can tell, with him."

"And you don't know when he'll be back?"

"No, but I think he'll take advantage of the good weather to take a long walk."

"All right. Please ask him to come to my house. Tell him I want to see him about something urgent."

The girl nodded, and Eve started back. On the way she stopped at the Madec window.

"If you can spare a minute, Vincente, will you come? You can help me take what's necessary to Big Louis. This won't do at all!"

She hardly waited for an answer.

She had in reserve the usual remedies. She must make a poultice, for Big Louis' lungs might be affected. He would need soothing drinks, too. Fortunately there was milk. The fire, ready laid, easily took light. The dry brush, crackling as it burned, gave forth a flame as delicate as lace.

The door opened. Eve did not turn. Vincente had been prompt. . . .

"Eve. . . ."

Big Louis stood on the threshold, wrapped

in his cloak. His old felt hat, pulled down over his ears, and fastened under his chin, threw a shadow over his thin bearded face. He held the bowl of roses between his hands.

She ran to him.

"What folly! I told you that I would come back."

She made him lie down on the couch. But at that moment Vincente arrived, and the two women put him to bed. He complained a little, but huddled down under the covers with an expression of satisfaction, and, after drinking some warm milk, fell asleep. The firelight played eerily over his pale haggard features.

Old Monsieur de Pontbihan arrived toward evening, dapper and perplexed, but very proud to have been called to the moor. On perceiving Big Louis in bed in the big room he made a grimace and started for the door.

Eve took him by the arm, gently, and led

him back to the middle of the room, without appearing to notice his bad humor. She relieved him of his hat and his cane and helped him out of his coat, all the while diverting him by her talk. At length he went over to the bed, looked at the patient, took his pulse, listened to his breathing.

"Yes—grippe, complicated by pneumonia. The crisis seems to have passed, but there's a relapse to look out for, on account of this foolishness. The bird must be husky. As soon as the fever is down he must be fed. He is completely exhausted."

Eve listened carefully, but appeared to give little heed. When the old doctor had finished she pretended to have forgotten the patient, and to be interested only in his savior. She served him tea before the fire, on a little table daintily dressed with a snowy cloth.

He droned on for more than an hour, and

she thought he would never go. But she knew she must make him want to return.

Taking leave at last, he pointed his cane toward Big Louis.

"Are you going to take care of that fellow? It's a risk. Be sure not to go too close. Grippe is contagious."

He spoke the word "fellow" with a sort of mild scorn, and his voice held a mixture of benevolence, curiosity and perhaps of insinuation. But Eve was too grateful at heart to be angry. She took him to the gate. There he placed his hand on her shoulder.

"Dear child, you will take cold in those clothes. Little lady in mousseline, hurry back in. I shall return to-morrow."

Eve pulled the collar of her woolen dress about her throat. She did not ask whether the old man's tone was paternal. What she thought of was his promise to come back.

XXIII

Eve stretched herself out on the cot in the alcove, but got up several times during the night, worried by Big Louis' profound sleep. Yet the doctor had reassured her; the patient must have passed the crisis, and he did not show the effects of having gone out-of-doors in a high fever. Finally she went to sleep.

When he wakened her, asking for a drink, it was almost daylight.

Monsieur de Pontbihan returned in the afternoon. The fever was better, but there was a great depression of the pulse. He must be kept in bed. Probably he had had no care since the beginning of his illness. His convalescence would be long.

"Do you want me to see about having him admitted to the hospital at Vannes? I know the head physician there very well, and he will admit him at once on my recommendation."

"Do you think that the hospital will be better for him, Doctor? We are here, Vincente and I. . . ."

"But, my dear child, you don't know what it is to have a patient of this sort on your hands for no one knows how long. And then, what would people say? . . ."

Eve shrugged her shoulders. She and Big Louis had lived for months on their promontory, far from people, and she had never asked herself whether any one was concerned about them. Since the war people had enough of a burden with their own affairs, their trials and disappointments, not to bother about what others were doing.

And then, above all, the "Demoiselle of

Landier" was not from Port-Navalo. She had lived abroad. Other countries, other customs. She was not proud, at any rate. She talked with every one, and had done favors for many. As for Big Louis, he enjoyed the immunity accorded the simple, those blessed of God, in Brittany. Besides, his gentleness and his mysterious reserve had won the women's hearts. Who would dare call down misfortune on himself by circulating bad reports about the Innocent?

"If those are your arguments, Doctor, I shall keep Big Louis. With your help we'll pull him out of this."

Madec, who was skilful in all the small trades, and a barber on occasion, came one day to shave him. When he attacked the thick hair, he exposed a large scar which ran along one side of the head from ear to temple.

Monsieur de Pontbihan passed his finger over it, examined it curiously.

"Ah! here is probably the key to the enigma. I thought that I was not dealing with a simpleton from birth. In his case it is especially the faculty of speech and the memory which seem to be affected. I wonder what my friend Le Stanff would think of him."

He referred to a famous surgeon.

Eve had never thought of surgical intervention. She had hoped by dint of patience and care at least to diminish the terrible gap, if not to lead Big Louis into a normal state.

Monsieur de Pontbihan continued, with a little more sympathy in his voice. Up till then he had spoken of the sick man with a certain contempt, a manifestation, probably, of the jealous resentment of a vain and aging man against a rival younger and perhaps beloved.

"We must have here a war casualty. I know cases of such traumatism. However, he has nothing of a French soldier about him.

I should say, rather, the Scandinavian type. At least—— Look at his jaw. They have jaws like that in England. At any rate, a true North-man."

A little ill at ease, without knowing why, Eve turned the conversation. What did Big Louis' past matter to her? She had welcomed him into her life just as he was, without knowing anything of him, not even his name.

Where had he come from? Eve trembled. She had instinctively put an end to the tests with photographs, after the sight of a uniform had disturbed him so. She remembered that the gossip was that he had appeared at Port-Navalo about the middle of the war, wearing hospital linen under a military coat whose origin the country people did not know. As the gendarmes did not disturb him, even the women who had sons at the front or husbands enduring the perils of war on the sea con-

cluded that he was, as they say, "*en règle.*"

Eve considered. . . . She asked herself whether the pictures of women and children had not brought up dark memories.

And if he were married. Was it not her duty to attempt the impossible; to help him regain his former personality and return to his family?

Her duty! . . . She shrugged her shoulders. So many people have a false conception of duty. For them, duty is a sacrifice. It has a long face, it exacts its pound of flesh. For her, duty began at home, and duty was happiness. Big Louis and she had found it, in the poor kingdom of the moor. If he had a wife, she had had time to console herself. If she had not done so, so much the worse for her! Each one for himself. Fate had placed this man in her path; one does not contradict fate. One does not consider life as a whole, but

takes it by phases, as if each were unattached to the past, as if there were no to-morrow. One opens it at random as one opens a book. Each moment is a life complete. The past crumbles like dead leaves, and no one is sure of the future. It is the present alone that counts. That is the statue on which one works. One molds its living matter . . . and Big Louis was of the present.

What was important now was to get him on his feet. Later, much later, when he should have his own word to say about things that concerned him, she could consider the question of an operation.

XXIV

In spite of predictions, his convalescence was rapid. He allowed himself to be cared for like a child. Every time that Eve appeared with the flower bowl, he got up with joyous haste. One would have said he understood that his recovery depended upon his good will.

One day, on her return from the village, she found him up and out on the moor where it was sunny. When she tried to persuade him to go back into the house, he exhibited that quiet and unbreakable stubbornness which was in him. Leaning on her shoulder he walked to the end of the path. From that point he saw his boat anchored in its usual place. The sight seemed to please him.

"Fishing soon, Eve," he said. "Do you remember?"

Remember! The word measured the progress of his own memory.

That night, quite reassured concerning him, she slept soundly. A deep fatigue weighed down upon her slumber. Through the alcove curtain she could feel that day had come, that it must be light in the big room, that Big Louis would be wanting his breakfast.

To her surprise, she heard movements in the kitchen. The reflection of a clear flame shone through the communicating doorway and an odor of fresh coffee came to her nostrils.

With a hurried movement she knotted up her hair.

Big Louis appeared, carefully carrying the bowl.

"You are the invalid."

The attention moved her deeply. In taking

the bowl her hands rested a moment on those of Big Louis, and glance was lost in glance.

Monsieur de Pontbihan came often enough, to spend the evening, and she enjoyed chatting with him. As long as he held to impersonal subjects, he was charming. But from time to time he risked excursions into a domain too intimate, and she had to be on her guard.

Eve had represented for him a desirable adventure for his declining years. He would not run the risk of compromising that. And if she accepted his attentions, she was not the woman to refuse the responsibility for her actions.

What had kept him in the path of virtue since he had lived at Port-Navalo was the fear of scandal. He watched with care that the peace of his life should not be disturbed. This preoccupation could be read on his face.

He always seemed to be looking through the blinds to see if some one in the street were not threatening his quiet.

None of his maneuvering escaped Eve; mingled boldness and prudence, brutality of purpose hidden under courteous words, or a declaration which would have entangled him ending very quickly in a pleasantry.

When he came to understand that his ambiguity of speech, looks, gestures, and his intentions on the whole did not deceive her, he abandoned these tactics. He was philosophical. This intelligent, animated woman, of an original mind, was a precious associate in the desert of Port-Navalo. He did not want to lose her. They became friends.

It was agreeable when returning from a hunt to pass the door of her house, to breathe there a different atmosphere, to be received with a pleasant word, to stretch his boots

before the fire, especially when he was in no hurry to get home, as on days when the humor of his young servant girl savored of storm. Eve had never appeared to notice his equivocal discourse or to take offense at his attitude, so that there was neither embarrassment on one side nor rancor on the other. She accepted him as a gentleman who was in the main kindly toward the world, a bit hypocritical, a bit weak, and, it pleased her to guess, sensible to her charm.

Big Louis and the doctor did not like each other. This feeling was entirely instinctive with the former.

With Monsieur de Pontbihan there was an unreasonable jealousy against the man whom he envied for being still young and toward whom he bore a grudge even for the affliction which attracted the hearts of women.

He pretended to forget Big Louis' name,

called him *"le grand gaillard,"* spoke of him in his presence as one speaks of the absent. He had the prudence to hurry his speech, to choose obscure terms, in the belief that the big fellow would not understand.

But what did not escape Big Louis was the sarcastic tone and the subtle malevolence of his gaze.

Little by little Eve managed things. She had nothing to dissemble. She had always treated Big Louis as a mysterious and almost sacred guest. The dignity which he brought to each of his actions prohibited familiarity. His muteness was inscrutable; no one knew what this mask of gentleness and dreaming concealed. The gamins of the village had never attempted to make of him an object of derision.

When the doctor at last got it through his head that there was nothing to be accom-

plished against this impregnable composure, he gave up his sport. In fact he even interested himself in the case to the extent of teaching the silent one several card games, which he said might develop his memory.

One evening he brought cigars and offered one to Big Louis.

Eve watched. . . .

Big Louis turned the cigar in his fingers an instant, smelled it, bit off the end, held it to the match which the doctor reached him and began to smoke with an air of contentment. A moment later he seemed to be searching for something. Eve handed him an ash-tray.

He stood up, his back to the fireplace, his body erect.

Her quick imagination evoked another image, a figure of ease and authority. Big Louis would wear evening clothes well. . . .

Once more, who was this man? She had

often noticed the delicacy with which he handled a fragile teacup or a silver spoon, the naturalness with which he opened the piano.

"Surely he is a prince!" she whispered.

She came out of her reverie, making fun of her fancies.

After all, she would do better to conclude simply that Big Louis had before this smoked a cigar and drunk a cup of tea.

She accepted him as he was. Indeed she was not far from wishing that he would remain always the wanderer who had come to her that winter night, with his grizzled saint's head and his eyes of a visionary. The idea of an operation which would make him like other men, and would renew the connection with a past to which she was a stranger, frightened her.

Sometimes in the evening when Monsieur de Pontbihan presented himself at the house,

Big Louis would get up abruptly and go out. And Eve, watching him from the window as he strode away over the moor, would recall the Breton superstition of a soul in anguish returned to haunt the earth.

The company of Madec was more welcome to him. The two often sat together in silence, braiding their willow baskets. Sometimes Big Louis would question the other, in his fashion, about happenings along the coast.

Using the warmer days as an excuse, Eve and Big Louis would go out for walks after supper. On such occasions they managed to delay their return until they were pretty sure that old Monsieur de Pontbihan would have long since begged his peevish servant to help him pull off his boots for the night.

And so the doctor's invasion passed as only an episode in their life, and they fell back upon their solitude.

XXV

Usually a living and liquid silence flowed between them, like a current of stainless water which carried their thoughts to each other; a beautiful transparent silence which hid nothing, neither assertion nor reproach, conflicting wishes nor unstilled desire.

Eve thought of the silence which had weighed upon that other companionship long ago, the stillness that was only a lying garment to hide a famished heart; a silence to be destroyed by a wounding word, or to be held as a secret shield, or to be hung as a sorry veil behind which the one assembled grievances against the other. . . . Silence more sorrowful than any speech . . . silence wherein one

measures the gulf into which he is falling, silence as rigid as metal, divorcing two souls; silence which they wish and yet do not wish to break, silence kept by the one through fear of the words he is tempted to speak, by the other through dread of what she must hear. . . . At the beginning of love there is silence, and silence is at its end.

With Big Louis, silence was not a policy, a weapon, a refuge or a defense. It was a means of expression. Not being able to make himself understood through words, he cast them aside as useless. It was better, he knew, to keep his thoughts shut in their fold than to let them clear the barrier of his lips in pitiful disorder.

One day Eve found him near a fountain not far from a small chapel which she sometimes visited during her walks to breathe the atmosphere of ancient peace and naive faith that had been created by generations of sail-

ors, come in solitary pilgrimage. She had not noticed him at first. He was seated on the curb; his jacket, discolored by the weather, blended with the bluish granite of the fountain, against which his great shoulders rested. He was holding a long rod in his motionless hands. What elusive thoughts had he driven before him with that staff, switching the furze and briars along the path?

To Eve he suddenly seemed a saint in stone. The arched fountain cast a hood of shadow over his face, which was uplifted, but with the eyelids lowered.

When he realized her presence a faint, almost imperceptible flush crept over his features. She could have believed his countenance a bas-relief in granite and the pulse beneath the flesh a miracle. Her gaze fixed itself upon his eyes, so clear and deep that she was tempted to bow in adoration, like many an-

other pilgrim who had leaned above the water of this humble fountain.

She took the stick from his hands and, seating herself at his feet, began to trace arabesques in the dust. Surely this was the carved saint himself come forth from his chapel to drink at the spring and to breathe the air of the cloistered moor! Almost timidly she turned to him. The big hand beneath her fingers did not tremble, nor did she herself draw back. A hand of marble, smooth, yet rugged and warmed by the sun; a hand that would hold tenderly for years a pilgrim's votive offering of flowers. . . . It was the saint's hand that she touched—and for the moment that was enough. The caress palpitated at the tips of her fingers, and without trying to prevent, she let its tiny drum-beat dwindle to quiet, still well within the pale of her heart's control.

But as any saint would have done—or at least the saint of the little chapel who looks down at sailor lads, saved from shipwreck, kneeling in spray-soaked garments—this saint, whose powerful hand felt the touch of those supple fingers, let his eyes rest on the face of Eve, the refugee.

With one accord they entered the chapel. They had only to lift the latch of the door, which opened slowly with a dull complaint. The gravel on the flagstones crunched under their feet. Stars painted on the azure vault made of it a pastoral sky which might be touched with the hand. Through the little window could be seen the shifting blue-green water; the air smelled of the burned-out candle, the polished wood, the dried flowers, above all, of the fresh sea breeze.

Big Louis sat beside Eve on one of the benches. Compared with this saint of hers,

the other saints of the chapel seemed more than a little dubious. Most of them had been carved in wood by the sailors of the district, honest but limited craftsmen who endowed their images with their own wild shagginess, their round black eyes, and a touch of vermilion on the cheek-bones to represent the sunburn of the ocean.

Evening came, evening that always brought him near to her. During the day he looked about him, but with no emergence from his remote absorption. Of the two he seemed the more preoccupied. In his affairs nature took the place of a trade, perhaps the place of an art. He was not to be disturbed when he was studying the progress of a cloud or the direction of a gust of wind. A beautiful sunny morning on the bay brought a tremor to his lips. He was a poet in his own fashion. Eve recognized the signs.

From the height of the promontory he would follow the maneuvers of a fishing boat caught in a squall, with a passion that possessed him wholly and abolished the world about him. He bit his lips, the veins in his neck swelled, his unwavering gaze seemed to stab the spray, his arms ridged their muscles like those of a steersman at the helm. Without speaking, Eve would watch the drama that played itself out in him.

In the evening he might have been taken for a normal man who returns home tired and seeking rest. She could not believe that those quiet eyes, so close to hers, were the same which a short while before had been wandering ceaselessly over the diverse pageant of his world, questioningly, helplessly, sometimes savagely. How they now hung on her glance, with a certain desperate desire to hold it fast! His eyes spoke the balanced language which

was refused his lips. They told of the long labor of the day, the day of a man of action who recounts its incidents at the fireside. And with a similar look Eve answered, without indulgence, without perplexity. He was no longer the strangeling; they had become equals. She conversed with him, discussed things with him, sometimes lent herself to the play of friendly teasing.

She would break the silence cautiously, reconnoiter for an opening as one hunts for a breach in the wall that surrounds a beautiful secluded garden.

She would whisper, "Big Louis . . ."

The response was always ready: "Eve?" His voice paused on the name, slightly questioning, charged with attention.

That was enough; in that instant he revealed himself. The soft modulation of that note, the sigh that followed, the instinctive

tenderness—none of these could belong to a brute. Once upon a time, in the half-light of evenings like this, he must in that same fashion have pronounced a woman's name. . . . It was at such twilight moments that the figure of what he must have been emerged from the shabby cloak of the fisherman. And before this new presence Eve grew timid.

XXVI

Big Louis had a friend. He was Abbé Alain, the vicar.

In this country they liked the Abbé! When he hurried by, his hat in his hand, his cassock, always a bit muddy, flapping about his sturdy legs, every one said indulgently:

"There is Abbé Alain going to the coast."

When preceding vicars had passed, the tone of comment had varied according to whether or not they were punctual at mass. And when it was a question of the curate, these sea-folk, with their sharp tongues, always found something to criticize. He talked too much or not enough; he was too proud or too familiar. It was an outrage for him to go into the bakery and choose his bread for himself. The present

curate, for instance, raised the covers of the women's market baskets, and when he did not buy, although they dared not say anything to his face, they declared that he made himself pretty free with things.

They paid less attention to the vicars, who were all alike, with their rosy cheeks, the white border on their collars, their slender figures in fringed sashes, and that fashion of tilting back their ecclesiastical hats so that they scarcely noted that your "cute little fellow" of last year had been succeeded by another.

When the curate appeared and the children had pointed him out, the women leaned over the geranium-pots in the windows, lowering their voices:

"Look, the curate . . ."

And they drew inferences concerning the purpose of his call.

But in the case of the Abbé they spoke out in a natural voice:

"Well, there's the Abbé Alain."

The laundress, who starched caps and who sat at her doorway watching every one who passed and sparing no comment, called out in a maternal voice:

"Hurry, Monsieur Alain, you will be late for mass!"

For his haste distinguished him as surely as his cassock. As they were all concerned with the sea they gave him on the way reports on the tide, the wind, and, after bad weather, on the position of his own boat.

There was affection in the way the women looked after him, while the men spoke of him with camaraderie mingled with pride. It was the first time they had had among them a curate who cared so little for the appearance of his cassock. On days when the hour of mass

coincided with the favoring tide the old men declared, with a wink, that the Abbé would cut the "pater" short so as not to miss his chance. He seemed more sailor than priest. He had a boat which he had christened *Le Rescapé*. For years it had lain in the mud of the gulf, having come from nobody knew where. Children had played about it, and no one had had any idea of putting it in shape to take to the water again. One fine day the Abbé was seen with an old greenish mackintosh slipped on over his cassock, stretched out on the sand by the boat, examining its wounds. That winter he came to the beach each day, equipped with hammer and nails, oakum and coal-tar, and the little bay, deserted by all but him, resounded to the sounds of his tinkering. The customs man on duty, and the laborer in the salt marsh, who kept his cow on the dikes while he waited for the salt deposits of the

coming summer, gave him advice and encouragement. As the winter was rainy the Abbé often got soaked through, in spite of his mackintosh.

"The poor devil gets his fun that way," his acquaintances would observe, with more amusement than commiseration in their voices. He was a sturdy fellow, and besides, every one knows that rain from the sea kills no one. They themselves had had many a wetting while at work, and had come to feel a sort of self-satisfied defiance in ignoring the water that streamed down their necks. Several of these worthies were not sorry to find that rain penetrates a cassock as well as a canvas jacket.

It was in the cave at the foot of the promontory that the friendship began between the Abbé Alain, head vicar, and Big Louis, the all-bereft.

One morning when he and Eve, kept indoors by the rain, were industriously bending over the spelling book, their lesson was interrupted by the noise of hammering. As they hurried out toward the end of the promontory they did not need to conjecture as to who was the culprit. At that moment the Abbé Alain, covered with mud, was profoundly regretting that he was not a simple sailor, so that he could relieve his feelings through certain expressions more sulphuric than those permitted a man of God. He had come too late for the tide to help him put the boat on its keel and was now furiously struggling to raise it with his shoulder.

Big Louis scrambled down the rocks. He was not one to give advice. Without a word he stooped over beside the Abbé. When they were ready the two men uttered the "Ah-yo!" of workmen, the boat rocked over on its keel,

and the Abbé could continue his hammering without further loss of time.

Curiously enough, he no longer seemed to be in a hurry. From the ridge of the moor Eve watched the two men, sitting side by side on the edge of the boat. She had no idea what they were talking about; their faces were turned to the sea, and the two broad backs, just alike, seemed almost comically non-committal. She had to return home alone.

When Big Louis came back a little later to get his tools she noticed a new expression on his face: the half boyish air of independence which invests a man who has just been conversing with another man on interests presumably outside the ken of women.

In the spring *Le Rescapé* was ready for its first voyage, and its two captains navigated it successfully around the Ile-aux-Moines. From that time on, the Abbé went out on the

gulf every day. From a distance he appeared as a black and agile silhouette, busied with the management of the cantankerous sail. On days when there were funerals or baptisms at the church, people would exclaim as they heard the varied summons of the bells: "Poor Monsieur Alain, how put out he must be!" Big Louis accompanied him only on "dancing days," as the Abbé called them. In his serious way he had concluded that a pleasure boat was not for him at all, especially if Eve had no place in it. He must continue his fishing in the lonely channel. His reward, when it was fine weather, was Eve's company.

In the summer, during the holidays, the Abbé dragged after him a band of little gamins, lay pupils of the Brotherhood School. There were no class distinctions; to the village they were "Monsieur Alain's cabin boys." The clattering of their sabots announced them

from afar. It made them puff hard to keep up with the priest, who scrambled down the sunken path with a kind of furious energy. The smallest of the urchins stuffed themselves, as they ran, with their slices of coarse bread, seasoned with lard. The Abbé never slackened his pace till he spied from a distance the bonnets of the good sisters who came out for air along the butte between noon and one o'clock. Then he would seize his rosary in one hand and his hat in the other; the devil alone knows from what pocket he had drawn them. One could perceive his lips moving. At the right moment he would raise his eyes, as if he had just become aware of the nuns, and would incline his head toward them in an unctuous bow. When he had passed—he knew well that the sisters never looked back—he would pull the ear of a straggler whose sabots had caught up with his own hob-nails, call him trifler with

an air of great resentment and descend the last slope four steps at a time.

He borrowed a skiff to get aboard. There were only two or three available, which belonged to retired mariners, shrewd old codgers who were generally lurking about behind the brush to look after their interests. It might happen that Monsieur Alain's boys, rowing vigorously, would snap off an oar like a match in the tholes. But the owner of the boat wouldn't complain very bitterly on hearing of the damage: the priest promised to repair it as soon as bad weather had come to keep him (theoretically) at the vicarage. He had strength to spare, had Monsieur Alain, and perhaps his church services had made him late that day, poor fellow!

On the return journey he often met Big Louis, also coming back, with his wicker chest of fish balanced on his head, and his body

turned three-quarters round as they passed, to guard against the friendly jostling to which the Abbé would try to subject him. But he never escaped completely, for the priest would insist that Big Louis put down the basket so that he might handle and appraise the catch.

They continued to consult each other about things of the sea. When the tide did not permit of their embarking, they sat together on the stone bench, where their conferences were interrupted only by the rush of the wind. This discourse, mellowed by contemplative pulls of their pipes, was worth more to Big Louis than his pointless dreams. Eve, from her window, looked on approvingly.

It was surprising how the two understood each other, the one at home in the ripe wisdom of the Latin fathers, the other guiltless of the sight of books. Seeing them laughing, she surmised that they were enjoying some childish

joke. And Big Louis emerged more and more frequently from his dark reverie.

But alas for the poor Abbé! A catastrophe overtook him. One day the postman handed him, instead of the Parochial Bulletin which he could stuff in his pocket beside his breviary, an imposing letter bearing the Bishop's seal and carrying the disastrous news that he had been appointed to a cure far inland. It appeared that since he was the head vicar it was his turn to leave. There was nothing to do but accept the honor. He came for the last time to the top of the promontory to say adieu to his beloved boat, crouching low at anchor as if trying to bury itself in the water. And the Abbé imagined that he could already see on the gunwale a hand bearing the episcopal ring.

XXVII

Eve recalled Big Louis' early habit of stopping at the gate of the little station at the moment when the locomotive, getting impatient on the brine-corroded rails, sent its hoarse whistle through the fog to warn the few travelers who had come in from the depths of the moor. He had even made several attempts to climb aboard, only to be pulled back by some one who shouted in his ear as if he were deaf that he couldn't travel without a ticket. With a sweeping gesture of the arm, they would point toward Landier, repeating "Go home, home, Big Louis," in the accents they would use in putting a lost dog back on the trail.

Now that he was trying to conduct himself

like everybody else he made no more such attempts, but he could still often be seen leaning on the gate at train-time, attentive to the sudden awakening of the little station, which immediately fell back into its somnolence when the train had departed. He would watch the last car growing smaller and smaller as it sped away down the camomile-bordered track and disappeared at length in the misty gray horizon. Then he would return home with shoulders stooping a bit, and head bent low.

For what country was he homesick? What old unhappiness was it that sent him on his swift silent walks along the coast, and that often beset him so that he would forget to return for his evening at Eve's side? Or what whispering regret lay behind those eyes, whose gaze so easily passed over things near at hand to lose itself in the distance?

How excited he had been when he returned

from his meetings with the Abbé Alain! He led Eve to the promontory and pointed out to her the islands in the gulf to which they had sailed.

It occurred to her who had taken his salvation in her hands that she must let him get away from Landier for a little while. The doctor and the Abbé had agreed. So one day she consulted time-tables, unfolded a map and traced with her finger an itinerary which she explained to Big Louis, and which he approved, with nods of his head and pleased smiles. He understood that they were to take the train the next day, that they would leave Port-Navalo, and he endeavored to repeat after her the name of Penmarch, their destination.

Four o'clock in the morning. . . . They stumbled through the fog to the station, helping each other along. The tickets were handed

out by candle-light. A single lantern threw its gleam across the rails. Women waited, motionless, patient figures, in their black dresses. They did not talk at the top of their voices as they did in the open air of the moor; here their words were whispers.

In the car everything was dark. Big Louis sat opposite Eve. The train started, with a mournful whistle like the hoot of a discouraged owl. They could smell the sharp odor of the sea. Little by little the countryside awoke, as an opaline warmth crept through the dense white mist. Big Louis said nothing, but from time to time the trembling contact of his big knees against hers revealed to Eve his excitement.

It was daylight when they reached Vannes. Here the real adventure commenced; a change of train, commotion, crowds of people. Eve, knowing that she must not hurry him, placed

her hand firmly on his arm. A few minutes later they were settled in a compartment, en route for Penmarch. They gazed solemnly at each other as if they had just come through a grueling test.

Other people eyed them, furtively. Eve quickly took account of herself. But it was upon Big Louis that their glances rested. It was difficult to say just what was strange about him; that day he was clothed like everybody else, although he had obstinately refused to wear a hat. But the immobility of his features, the fixity of his gaze, the tension of his body, made more rigid than usual by his inward excitement, arrested notice.

Eve was not embarrassed. She acknowledged to herself that he was not, and probably never would be, a normal man. But she shared his infirmity. It had become subtly and tenderly her own as well, and in her attitude was

the half-jealous protectiveness that is felt by those who guide the steps of the blind.

As they approached Penmarch the country became brighter, the villages and people more and more infrequent. Near the hamlets there remained only a fringe of pilgrim trees which seemed to turn and bow in unison to the land, after having rendered homage to the eternal sea.

Big Louis' expression relaxed. No one stared at him now. He felt at home among these people of Finisterre, with their large severe faces and their steady eyes. When they entered the car they said by way of salutation, "Fine weather, to-day!" like all sea-folk, who see in a fine day a special gift. Big Louis was so accustomed to this exclamation that he returned it warmly, with a friendly nod of his head.

Arrived at Penmarch they immediately

took the path to the shore, after Big Louis had, with a single growl, scattered a swarm of urchins who were clamoring to guide them. Eve laughed to see the young pirates scuttling away.

Her companion was exultant now, relieved of the constraint in which he had been held since morning by the presence of inquisitive faces.

They sat down on the rocks which the sea had dug out, and which seemed higher than the rest of the world. They could see on the horizon the golden curve of the Bay of Audienne, flanked by two granite headlands between which the ocean hung its azure nets and the scales of the sunfish gleamed.

At intervals appeared the silhouettes of young girls, the lace-makers, frail princesses with frail white hands, priestesses of a delicate craft, reigning here in their cloister of

granite and foam. One rarely sees them in groups. Each is content to be alone with the sea. Each chooses her rocky throne, and there in hieratic calm, with even features shaded by the multifold ruffles of her cap, composes herself with never a thought that she rules a royal domain. The high gates of her dreams shelter her from the world.

Eve, too, was a soul apart. Not even love could encroach upon her. But, like the others, she also needed a shadow of life in her solitude.

Slim girls of Penmarch, bright symbols of a somber land . . . lace on granite . . . beating of wings on the crest of the rocks . . . blue gaze falling like clear water from the cliff. . . . Lemordant must have watched them from his cabin, now abandoned, with its single shutter closed. One approaches and applies his ear to the door. Only a sigh of the ocean, yet one can not imagine empty dark-

ness inside. . . . Surely a human heart is beating there. . . .

Eve stretched out on the warm ground. Above her was only fathomless space, where the blue light undulated like a flax field in bloom. On either side towered the giant rocks like shaggy shepherds guarding the earth.

She had no other desire than to lose herself in this universe, to hear about her the whisper of the great invisible veil as it quivered in the breeze. The vast panorama was reduced to the two elements of sea and earth, for the sky was now only a gossamer screen which softened their startling contrast.

Big Louis and she were two pilgrims on the road, in a land of grandeur and solitude. And she had a feeling that never, never in this world, would they reach its end.

She thought of those far-away holidays with her grandparents, and of the processions

across the moor, with the crowd streaming like a black ribbon behind the flowery banners. Often, trailing the cortège, would follow a sad-faced woman leading by the hand an innocent with darkened mind. And Eve seemed to hear in the vastness of space the passionate swell of the great litany:

"Holy Mary of the Sea, protect us!"

Worn out with the heat, she rested her head upon the knees of Big Louis, and, lulled by the droning of insects, fell asleep. For how long? A few minutes, an eternity? When she opened her eyes nothing had changed: the clouds drifted tranquilly across the rock-supported sky, and this humble man of endless faith, bending above to protect her face from the sun-glare, was watching over her.

XXVIII

After much thought she concluded that what had hurt her formerly had been her desire to conquer men, to absorb them, to dominate them.

The soul of the North can not mingle with another; it remains one and indivisible. The white wolf is a creature of the solitudes. Knowing that, each member of the pack fortifies himself alone on his steppe, without attempting intimacy, and thus all can live as good neighbors. But let a stranger arrive, from the land where souls blend as the perfume of flowers, and the conflict begins.

Eve admitted, also, that that spirit of the cold confines might at times wander south,

and, indeed, over all the earth. Yet his true home is there on the icy plains under the low-pitched, pallid sky, where she had first come face to face with him.

Against Big Louis there was no need for her to defend herself, no need to struggle or to dominate, no reason to fear that terrifying sensation of walking on a glacier where every few steps gained bring their corresponding loss; no need to dissimulate, to strive to suit herself to his humor. He was like the very stuff of the country, granite under the mist and the sun. Like it, he gave an impression of permanence; he was man everlasting, and in him her feminine soul, haunted by the idea of death, might find refuge.

He was utterly trustful. At the same time an intangible but unmistakable personality sheltered itself behind the rampart of his very weakness. His gentleness flowed like a stream

around the hard rough pebbles of his speech.

Yet even in his talk he was making progress. He often spoke for several minutes at a time. The company of the Abbé Alain had given him a certain confidence. But he was slow to adopt new expressions. Each one was a strange province which he skirted cautiously before venturing to enter. At first he could not separate the phrases from the circumstances in which he had heard them. A certain word, for instance, Eve had spoken while she pressed her face against the window and peered out over the moor. To Big Louis it must have seemed that this word itself had a face which watched from a window; it reclaimed the savor of the open air at twilight, and it would not return to his lips in any other setting.

He often referred to her trip to Paris, not with resentment, for resentment was a feeling unknown to him, but because the trip had

broken the chain of daily routine. Perhaps, also, he was perplexed because Eve could not explain to him the reasons for it.

One day when they were sitting on the stone bench a few steps from the house, he returned to the problem:

"You went away."

"I went away."

"Why?"

Short of arguments, she replied:

"To be sure of wanting to come back."

"You left me."

"I left the house, too; I was sure of finding it again."

"I was sick. If I had died?"

"Let's see, Big Louis, . . . if you had died . . . what would be left? The house, the moor and I. Does that seem possible to you? The house, the moor, Eve, without Big Louis?"

And more in fact than in fancy the four did constitute a whole. The foundation of the moor supported the human pair, who in turn leaned back upon the little house. A definite unit, manifestly,—and he concluded, through his simple logic, that in very truth Eve could not disengage herself from it, to go away for ever.

The idea that she might be able to exist alone, lost in this waste, seemed to him unthinkable and yet at the same time made him feel a sort of a physical hurt. As if to materialize their oneness he passed his arm about her shoulders.

The gesture was so new in him that it amazed them both, and filled them with an emotion almost painful. They remained silent, the hand of Big Louis resting upon a heart whose beat was suspended. . . . They dared not separate until night had woven its first shadows around them. Once he turned to her

in a sort of bewildered despair. He could not control the trembling of his lips.

"I am alive, am I not? You are not a dream? Ah! to understand, to remember. . . . It seems to me that some one has attacked me, thrown me into a pit . . . and I can not get out."

She tried to check her shiver at these words. She could not tell him that she also at times wondered if he were not a legend of the moor, a phantom which would dissolve with the mist . . . only the whisper of a name. . . .

But dreams brought them nothing. She got up and led him back to his work.

They spent the summer fishing and in carefree vagabondage. They became free habitants of the open air, alert, bronzed, drinking in sun and breeze through every pore.

XXIX

It was not only his silence, his voice, his gaze which exerted their magnetism. There was also his smile.

It began in his eyes, where it was a light, then descended to his lips where it became only a reflection. The corners of his mouth lifted ever so slightly. One thought of a child's face turned to its mother's, or toward a voice which it is just beginning to know, and of lips which for the first time frame the shy attempt at a smile.

From a distance Big Louis' gaze would meet the glance of Eve, and his face, slightly inclined toward her, would look and listen at the same time. His smile would remain only a

quiver, a relaxation, a slow almost imperceptible softening of the strong lines of his mouth, like the faint blurring seen in the stone features of time-worn sculpture. No outright, robust joy was in that smile, but wonder, naïveté, serenity, tenderness.

Eve had lost her longing to penetrate the fragile barrier in an effort to appraise the innocence of the heart that was sheltered there. In her eyes every human personality was so complex as to defy analysis beyond the moment. She knew that her own changed every day in substance and in garment. And the personality of Big Louis was outside the common measure. He remained the Innocent because he remained distant. But she had the feeling that behind his remoteness dwelt an invincible spirit.

She must continue her pilgrimage toward him. His was the face which appeared in the

shadows; he was the statue of silence and mystery. He ignored studied words and gestures. He was a man of the first ages, before human laws. Civilization had not created him; it had passed him by, untouched.

Sometimes in the hours of illusion—and her life was made up of such hours—she flattered herself that she had changed him. But in tranquil, honest communion with herself she admitted that he was still a wanderer on the highways of thought, the cripple of stammering words and broken gestures, the shy devotee at the church door, with eyes questing and ears enchanted by the eternal litanies.

If he no longer had that vague, poignant, and terrifying expression it was because he had finally taken into the compass of his inner life Eve herself, and the moor. But he lived at a crossroads, eternally. There he would stand in his familiar attitude, his arms folded,

his head bent, alive to the winds and the rumors of the world without understanding them, and bearing on his features a weariness, a submerged suffering, a surrender that were almost feminine, especially when Eve the samaritan was not there to dispel them with her smile.

She moved at ease in this boundless love, pursuing her journey from arch to arch in a province without human horizons. And she realized that he, in his turn, was making his blind, uncertain way toward her.

He must understand her still less than she understood him. But perhaps he did not need to understand. When he approached her in the desolation of the moor he sometimes had the fascinated, amazed, almost frightened look of the first man face to face with the first woman. Yet the hint of domination was in him, too.

When they went to bed at night, she in the lower room, he in the granary above—rooms of the same dimensions, where their bodies lay in the same direction toward the promontory of the moor—Eve no longer watched uneasily the faint glimmer of the little windows. She no longer felt herself slipping into that gulf of obscurity which extended its length, width and depth about her. She opened her eyes without fear; he was there, and he held her high above all dangers. They were carried in the axis of the same vessel over the same sea.

Although only a ceiling of planks divided them she never spoke to him, once they had parted for the night. Each entered his own province. There must be open air around the name of Big Louis; it was from the moor in the morning that she would call her greeting.

Their lives were parallel, not mingled.

One evening, after he had climbed to his granary, she went out. The white wolf of solitude and moonlight was calling. But Eve broke the enchantment, resumed again her old self-dominance. She was alone between the bare earth and the naked sea, measuring her strength with theirs.

The protecting window was open; there was nothing to fear. A cry for help would reach the sleeper.

A white dew fell from the sky upon the magnified expanse of the promontory, which in the silvery light took on an arctic semblance. The shrubbery, rounded and powdery, presented a supernatural appearance. Between the clumps of furze long threads of dew, like jeweled spider-webs, formed lace of an art so perfect as to throw a sort of panic into the heart.

With light step she descended the path of

smooth pebbles which Big Louis had traced, passed through the small gate that was always left open, crossed the round-way which no one ever traveled, and continued on to the jutting rocks, where in the daytime they came to sit together.

She felt light in body and soul, at peace with herself. She seemed to see her own image at her side, and in whispered, intimate chat she congratulated this former unhappy Eve upon the joy that now encompassed her like the magical benison of the moonlight.

The bareness of the country brought security. There was nothing to hide. Only the clouds trailed their long, voyaging shadows over the ground. The breeze moved the moon suspended in the sky. The earth and the heavens formed the frame for a ghost.

And the ghost did not delay.

But Eve, still unaware, descended the path

of the luminous pebbles. The wild moor was transformed by the witchery of the dew into a fantastic elfland. Between the grotesque shapes of the bushes glided the ghost.

Big Louis was clothed in a shirt with open collar and in trousers of white canvas. Sleep had ruffled his hair, which was tossed back from his forehead.

Eve stood up on the rock, her wondering face toward him. When he was near she allowed herself to slip into his arms. Their bodies through their scant garments were bare and warm and close, as in the first days of the world. She knew that she must not struggle. His embrace did not relax. Her murmur was like a faint little moan, but it was not of him that she was afraid. Suddenly, moved by that appeal which flickered about his heart without knowing which cord to touch, he loosened his grasp. His hands, acquiescent, dropped to his sides.

They sat down on the rock overlooking the waves. The clamor of the tide rose about them. In the daytime Eve sometimes amused herself by crying above it; the folly of the sea was contagious. But now the turbulent voice became a nocturnal chant which contained more inconsolable distress than fury. It was good to be two shadows instead of one, bending down to hear it.

They went home by the round-way. Their gaze was straight ahead, yet they saw each other. They did not talk, but the intimacy created by words whispered in the darkness and cut by the silence floated between them.

The night had a simple peace. The time of pursuit and insatiable quest, of flood gnawing around the cold stones of the heart, of silent calling without pause and without echo, of sudden distaste that let the waters flow over

her illusions—all these Eve thought far distant.

She often said, laughing, that she had been born with a taste for tears. They still trembled behind her eyelids, tears that she was not ashamed to feel when she escaped for an instant into the moor, there to lean her tired face against its rough gray sleeve. When she was deeply moved these unrealized tears wove round her a delicate, shimmering garment. They had changed in meaning, but they had not dried. The old taste for suffering, which she could not deny, was with her. Tears gave her happiness its assurance of truth, by linking it with sorrow.

As they mounted the path Big Louis placed his hand firmly against Eve's back and she became again the comrade whom one helps. She was careful not to break the threads of dew, and he, too, was careful.

She had resumed her light talk. She wanted to laugh, to sing, to tantalize, to see waken in the conquered and silent man at her side only that one mighty instinct, so that she might dominate him with a sigh. But apparently he was not in the mood that evening to lend himself to a woman's whims.

Eve became grave. She must take no false step. She recalled several occasions when, almost without realizing it, and moved by her fear of being afraid, she had put an instinctive defiance in her voice. Even now she could recall how as he strode away from the house his shoulders straightened with a mixture of surprise, vexation and disappointment. He would return only when his mood had been dissipated by the sharp caress of the sea-wind. And she had gone to meet him, cautiously, begging truce with the small flag of an uncertain smile.

To-night he approached the stone steps in silence.

Once inside she waited, motionless, without lighting the lamp. Her eyes were on the window.

Lately he had formed the habit, when going out for the night, of pressing his face to the pane. From the inside Eve too would place her forehead against the glass, and thus with eyes close in the darkness they would say good night.

This time he did not stop. She heard him climb the stairs, and heard the familiar creak of the planks under his tread.

In a moment he was asleep. A sleep without dreams . . . a man's sleep.

XXX

Eve realized that the impression of his unreality would not disappear until more than a communion of mind existed between them. Until now they had gone on, inseparable, neither happy without the other, but only as in a chaste betrothal. The man sometimes struggled against the obscure instinct which impelled him toward her, and the woman, forewarned, maintained her guard.

She had at first thought that, loving Big Louis, all would be simple. She had not learned the art that some women possess to a supreme degree of offering in order to refuse, of holding the grapes of temptation to a man's lips only to snatch them back with a laugh of

feigned innocence or a gesture of distaste before the desire in his eyes. Such women are the merchants of love, wise in all the feints of bargaining.

She who had not forgotten the sweep of passion or the rhythm of beating hearts would need only to guide him by an easy ascent to her unresistant surrender in his arms.

But all her traditional ideas raised their formidable barrier before her; the avatar of the past proclaimed its law. One does not go forth to hunt love as one stalks a prey. On the heights of the white road the woman must wait.

Deliberately to bewitch Big Louis would have seemed to her not only to forsake delicacy and even decency, but to be guilty of violating a free will and of pillaging a human soul. He must come to her with full knowledge and complete desire. She did not

want him to succumb only to that instinct that at times made him crush her in a wild embrace. In the ravaged spaces of his memory he must hear a finer call, and, hearing it, want to follow.

Big Louis was the god of her household, the blameless image proffered by a miracle for her adoration. It remained in her hands to keep the god inviolate, the idol intact. It was so easy to destroy! There were already so many ruins of the past. . . .

But now his wise, strong hands were raised in an instinctive gesture of protection around his heart where the precious treasure lay. And that was why, when this mazed and troubled man abandoned himself to her, Eve prayed for strength to repulse him, through her fear and her certainty that haste on her part would spoil a perfect work.

For he was not ready. She could still see

too much of the white wolf's soul in his eyes. She had long believed that it would be easy for her to go to him, place her hands on his shoulders and say:

"Big Louis, it is time."

It was the phrase which she spoke every night, and which he had learned to echo mechanically. But his lips would chill to marble rather than give the words a different meaning.

Winter came again, closing its walls around them, rendering their intimacy still more complete. The anniversary of the Armistice tolled its sad bells once more; then soon it was Christmas, a Christmas powdered with a snow that made their moor as shining and white as a child's paradise.

On this occasion Eve invited to Landier the little Madecs, including her tiny god-son, who

now could walk alone. They spent a charming afternoon. Big Louis made a wolf, a horse and a dog, all perfect. A Christmas tree held the place of honor in the big room.

After the distribution of tart luscious oranges which Yvonne peeled in great glee—they never saw oranges the rest of the year at Port-Navalo—they took the children home. For fear of offending the good people Eve and Big Louis lingered a while to have coffee.

They returned by the road, which seemed strangely clear that night, instead of muddy and dark between the hedges. Snow was falling. The miracle had happened; the glittering white country had come from afar to stretch itself with curiosity and trust upon the sable land of the moor. All hostility was suspended; the two plains made airy festival. The earth seemed to lean its elbows upon its wreathed terraces, the better to see those fawn eyes of

the North, gentle, timid and watchful, and those silvered hands that flitted and disappeared in the foliage of the great tree, which was this snow of December. The "Ladies" of Big Louis danced no more upon the sea, but one heard in the sky the fluttering of their robes. The house was softened under its festoons. It had remained lighted, and as Eve and Big Louis approached they could see through the curtains the row of geranium pots which they had had to bring in on account of the cold.

They had supper, a finer one than usual, there in the back room that was decorated with mistletoe which this man with the towering figure of a druid had gathered along the coast merely by stretching out his arms. After supper they opened the door, in spite of the cold, to look out at the marvel of these twin plains of earth and sky, alike frosted and

sparkling. Then they settled themselves for the evening.

Big Louis felt that this night was different from all other nights. For now one did not work; Queen Anne did not come forth from her album, nor the sheets covered with writing from their drawer. Eve sat in the big armchair. The Christmas candles were burned out. Only the fire on the hearth lighted the big room.

He remained standing, with his back to the blaze, seemingly to support the heavy framework of the house upon his shoulders. He was contemplatively smoking his cigar. Eve grew impatient for him to finish. That pose was for her powerfully, painfully provocative. Was it really he who stood a few paces from her . . . or was it the other?

His immobility and his silence, in which she usually found nothing abnormal, now

weighed down upon her. She felt them charged with a new meaning.

Ordinarily she imitated his calmness, when meeting his glance. Through their eyes alone these two souls joined each other, penetrated each other, flowed together like living waters.

But now in the half-obscurity she could scarcely distinguish his face; it appeared like the white blur of a mask, its eyes two holes of darkness. And those lips that were lost in the shadows were about to pronounce her fate. . . . He seemed to her to approach and retreat miraculously, first to be no more than a dim phantom at the other end of the room, then a tall form bending over her.

She had been silent so long that she dared not raise her voice. It was within herself that she whispered:

"Oh, Big Louis, if you are not a dream, come to me! I can not go to you, Big Louis,

because love chains my hands and my feet. It is time to break the spell which keeps us apart. We have been waiting a long, long time. Two years—two years on this moor that is only an extension of the far-away land where once I met and lost you, so many years ago! If you had to expiate the sins of a past life, you have suffered and you are forgiven. And I, if I have sinned, I come to you now, humble and quiet, my Louis. . . ."

Eve resembled the lifeless image of Queen Anne, there in her high armchair. The atmosphere of the cottage was blurred with tears.

The spirits of the moor had dropped their dark veils and were gathering in silver robes above the earth that lay smooth and gleaming as the brow of a child. All humanity seemed to lean toward its purity. The snow fell so tenderly that one could imagine the doves huddling together, breast to breast, on the

edge of the roof. Long shafts of moonlight entering through the narrow windows transformed the room into a votive chapel.

Midnight sounded from a belfry somewhere. The carillon seemed to roll in from a vast distance, strong and sonorous.

Suddenly the reborn one turned toward Eve. The firelight touched his forehead as he passed, and etched his profile like a medallion in bronze.

With one knee on the floor he bent before her to render homage. Then dropping his face upon the hot hands crossed in her lap, he murmured, with his familiar stammer, the words of every night:

"Eve, it is time."

THE END

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